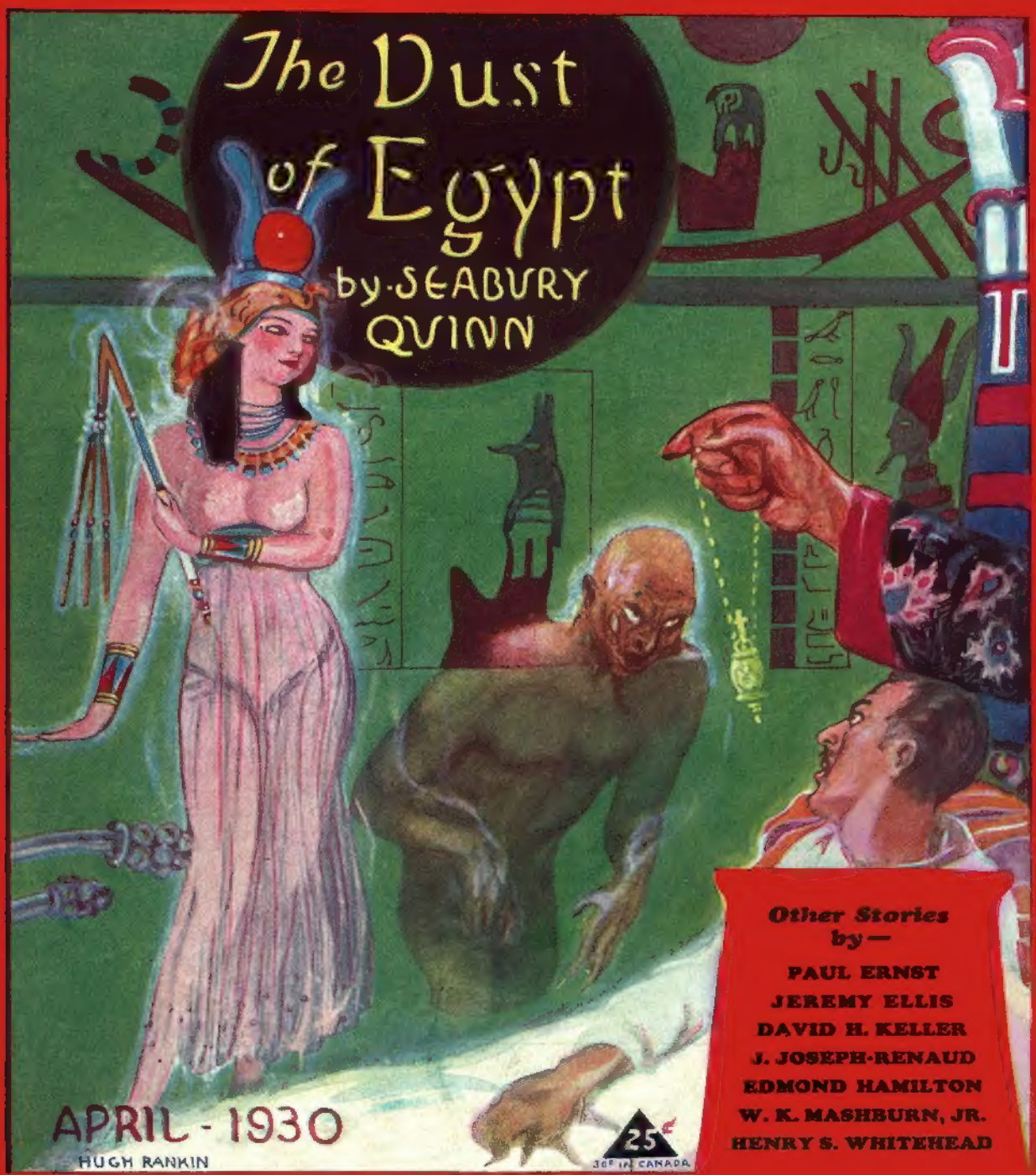
Weird Tales

The Unique Magazine



Other Stories by—

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Ship me the Corona, F.O.B. Chicago. On arrival I'll deposit $2 with express agent. If I keep the machine, I'll send you $3 a month until the $37.90 balance of $39.90 price is paid; the title to remain with you until then. I am to have 10 days to try the typewriter. If I decide not to keep it, I will repack and return to express agent, who will return my $2. You are to give your standard guarantee.

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Employed by _____

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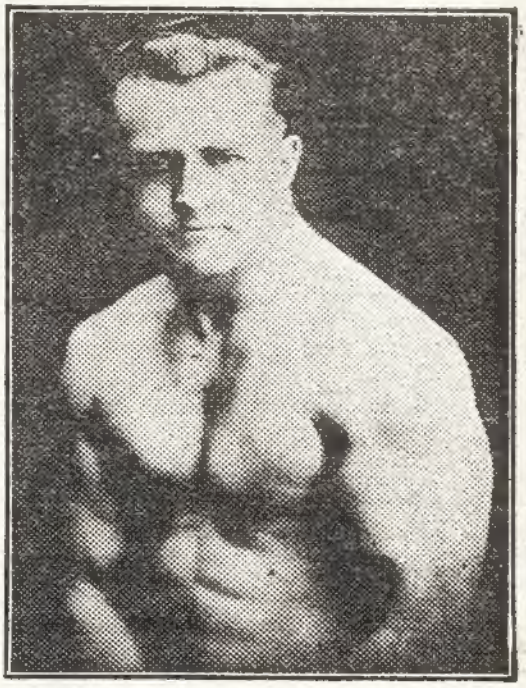

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Sounds pretty good, what? You can bet your old ukulele it's good. It's wonderful. And don't forget fellow—I'm not just promising all this—I guarantee it. Well, let's get busy, I want action—So do you.

SEND FOR MY NEW 64-PAGE BOOK

"Muscular Development"

IT IS FREE!

It contains forty-eight full-page photographs of myself and some of the many prize-winning pupils I have trained. Some of these came to me as pitiful weaklings, imploring me to help them. Look them over now and you will marvel at their present physiques. This book will prove an impetus and a real inspiration to you. It will thrill you through and through. This will not obligate you at all, but for the sake of your future health and happiness do not put it off. Send today—right now before you turn this page.

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Dept. 3304 305 Broadway New York City

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Dear Sir:—Please send me without any obligation on my part whatever, a copy of your latest book "Muscular Development."
(Please write or print plainly)

Name_____ Age____

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Weird Tales

REGISTERED IN U.S. PATENT OFFICE

A MAGAZINE of the BIZARRE and UNUSUAL

VOLUME XV NUMBER 4

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FARNSWORTH WRIGHT, Editor.

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THE EYRIE

THE feature story of the February WEIRD TALES, *Thirsty Blades*, by Otis Adelbert Kline and E. Hoffmann Price, easily won first place in the hearts of the readers, as evidenced by the many letters sent in to the Eyrie. Its delightful combination of Oriental adventure and extreme weirdness gained instant favor for it. What is your favorite story in the present issue?

"*Thirsty Blades* is fine," writes Robert E. Howard from his home in Texas. "It moves like a cavalry charge, with an incessant clashing of steel that stirs the blood. Gigantic shadows from the outer gulfs fall across the actors of the drama, yet the sense of realism is skilfully retained."

Dale V. Simpson, of Marion, Ohio, writes to the Eyrie: "It is my wish to express my belated appreciation of your magazine and the authors who furnish its marvelous stories. I say 'marvelous' advisedly; at least, to me they seem so. An oasis in the desert of commonplace literature, in a manner of speaking. (Somehow this phrase does not seem quite original with me, but it expresses my meaning.) I purchased the first copy which appeared on the news stands, and have never missed more than one or two issues since. I *think* (and it certainly takes considerable thinking to decide) that H. P. Lovecraft is my favorite author. I wish his tales might appear in every issue. And my choice of all the stories which have appeared in your magazine since its birth is his *Dunwich Horror*. This prevented me, for days, from giving full attention to my work. Always have horrors which might lurk in deep, dark caves underground, or dim-lit caverns deep under the sea, fascinated me. As a child I would scream with terror if allowed to look into a deep well; yet at the first opportunity I would return to torment myself by again gazing into the dark depths. But *The Dunwich Horror* transported me, upon the wings of imagination, to the uttermost depths of vast caverns in the bowels of the earth—caverns which are swept by foul, moaning winds laden with the breath of the grave and which contain cosmic cesspools wherein the corruption, filth and evil of millions of

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Has True Love Come To You?

HAVE you ever experienced the *thrill* of true love or didn't you recognize it when it came? Can you tell when a person really loves you? Is your love-life unhappy because you don't know the vital, fundamental facts about life? Are there certain questions about your sex-life you would like to ask your family physician? If you want the mysteries of sex explained clearly and frankly, clip and mail the coupon below at once.

Learn the Truth About Life

How long must we be slaves to prudery? Will you let "false modesty" rob you of the right to understand the greatest force of life? Why continue to stumble along in ignorance—making costly mistakes that may wreck your happiness—when it is so easy to learn the truth about sex? Thanks to Dr. B. G. Jefferis, Ph.D., a large 512-page book—"Safe Counsel"—has been written that explains in easy-to-understand language the things you should know about your body, your desires and your impulses. It answers the questions that brides want to know on the eve of their wedding—that youth approaching manhood demand of their elders—that married people should know. The *real* facts are told—*frankly* and *truthfully*. Over 100 illustrations explain many subjects that have long puzzled you.

DO YOU KNOW

How to woo to win?
How to keep love aflaming?
What every girl should know?
Ethics of the unmarried?
How to perpetuate the honeymoon?
The mistakes every couple should avoid?
How to control your impulses?
What kind of women make the best wives?
What men love in women?
The kind of a man that always attracts women?
Why petting is dangerous?
How to fascinate the other sex?
What every young man should know?

Answers Questions Frankly

"Safe Counsel" discusses the most intimate problems of your life. This big book has 512 pages—10 Special Sections—109 Subdivisions—each treating a different phase of the sex question. Here are a few of the subjects discussed: The Power and Peculiarities of Love. Advice to Newly Married Couples. Anatomy and Physiology. Birth Control. Secrets of Marriage. Sex Determination. At What Age to Marry. When to Set the Wedding Date. How to Win and Hold Love. Mistakes Every Bridegroom Should Avoid. Private Words to Maidens. Answers to Sex Questions. The Art of Happy Marriages. Diseases and Disorders—What to Do. The Social Evil. Advice to Expectant Mothers. Childbirth—and scores of other intimate subjects. You owe it to yourself to get direct, first-hand knowledge on sex matters. Don't let another day pass until you get a copy of this great book.

It is impossible to give you all the facts about this wonderful book here, but if you would like to see a copy without risking a cent, just mail the coupon and a copy will be sent at once.

SEND NO MONEY
Simply Mail the Coupon—

Don't send any now. Just clip and mail the coupon. We will send the regular $4.00 Gift Edition of "Safe Counsel" by return mail. When it arrives hand the postman the Special Reduced Price of only $1.98, plus postage. Read the book for 5 days. If not satisfied, return it and your money will be refunded. You take no risk. So order now!

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800 No. Clark St., Dept. 8600, Chicago, Ill.

Please send me a copy of the $4.00 Gift Edition of "Safe Counsel" in a plain wrapper marked "Personal." I will pay the postman only $1.98, plus postage, upon arrival. Although I am benefiting by this special reduced offer, I may return the book within 5 days, if not satisfied and you agree to refund my money.

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Street & No._____

City & State_____

If you may be out when the postman calls send $3.00 cash with order and we will pay the postage.

Price outside of U.S.—$2.50, cash with order.

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centuries have accumulated; from there I traveled, in an instant, to far-off worlds or planes where only a brief glimpse of unnamable horrors and formless, space-filling, alien entities sent me scurrying and screaming (mentally) with terror back to my warm fireside. I ask you, what need have I of an interplanetary vessel when I can read such stories?"

"I am for more werewolf and vampire stories," writes James J. Mack, of Philadelphia. "Do not discontinue torture stories. I find the poems in the latest issue of W. T. are gems, especially Clark Ashton Smith's *Ougabalys.* Being a prize fighter, I naturally keep my mind off the coming fight, and WEIRD TALES helps me splendidly. My favorite authors are H. P. Lovecraft and Seabury Quinn."

"It isn't my custom to write puff-letters to magazines," say Paul Thibault, of San Diego, California, in a letter to the Eyrie, "but a story in the December issue of WEIRD TALES makes for the exception. It is *The Dancer in the Crystal,* by Francis Flagg. You should give us more of this man's work. The last one of his appeared so long ago that it seems an age. It was called *The Chemical Brain,* and was a finely done piece of work. Most of the science stories are so far-fetched that they sound like hokum, but Flagg seems to base his work on possibilities. I hope to read his stories more regularly in WEIRD TALES."

Charles E. Hampel, of San Pedro, California, makes an acrostic out of WEIRD TALES:

Weirder and wilder than ever,
Ever its fiction unique,
Its stories are gripping and clever,
Reaching each month a new peak.
Driving thru vast stellar spaces,

Tapping the atom's core;
A-bridging the gap to the future,
Living the past again o'er.
Editor, accept my good wishes:
Success to you evermore.

"Be careful not to print too much weird-scientific fiction in a single copy," warns A. V. Pershing. "Two should be about the limit in a single copy. Give us more stories like *The Red Fetish* and *Dead Girl Finotte* or Whitehead's 'Zombie' stories. Werewolf stories should be revived. They always go across big. The same is true of Chinese stories. I also think it would be a fine thing to give over a page to the discussion of 'real or apparent' ghost houses, ghost tales, ghosts, and ghost phenomena."

A letter from Marie Armstrong, of Great Neck, New York, says: "That story by Mr. Quinn about the cat-people was by far the best he has done and I think about the best thing you have published. Mr. Quinn repeats himself

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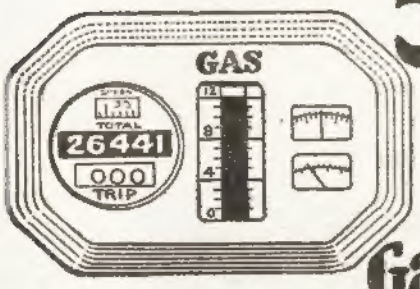
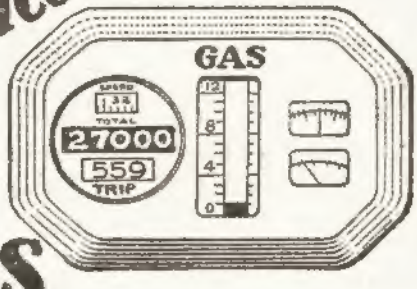
Over the Mountains from Los Angeles 559 Miles on 11 Gallons of GAS





Think of it! FIVE HUNDRED FIFTY-NINE MILES over rough mountainous country burning only ELEVEN GALLONS OF GASOLINE. Imagine more than FIFTY MILES to the GALLON. That is what the WHIRLWIND CARBURETING DEVICE does for D. R. Gilbert, enough of a saving on just one trip to more than pay the cost of the Whirlwind.

THE WHIRLWIND SAVES MOTORISTS MILLIONS OF DOLLARS YEARLY

Whirlwind users, reporting the results of their tests, are amazed at the results they are getting. Letters keep streaming into the office telling of mileages all the way from 22 to 59 miles on a gallon, resulting in a saving of from 25% to 50% in gas bills alone.

Mark H. Estes writes: "I was making 17 miles to the gallon on my Pontiac Coupe. Today, with the Whirlwind, I am making 35 5/10 miles to the gallon. Am I glad I put it on? I'll say so!"

P. P. Goerzen writes: "I made an actual test both with and without a Whirlwind, getting 13½ miles without and 34 6/10 miles with the Whirlwind, or a gain of 21 miles to the gallon. The longer the Whirlwind is in use on the machine the better the engine runs, has more pep and quicker starting. It makes a new engine out of an old one, and starts at the touch of the starter button."

R. J. Tulp: "The Whirlwind increased the mileage on our Ford truck from 12 to 26 miles to gallon and 25% in speed. We placed another on a Willys-Knight and increased from 12 to 17 miles per gallon."

Arthur Grant: "I have an Oakland touring car that has been giving me 15 miles to the gallon average, but I can see a great difference with the Whirlwind, as it climbs the big hills on high and gives me better than 23 miles to the gallon of gas, which is better than 50% saving in gas."

W. A. Scott: "I had my Whirlwind for three years. Winter and summer it gives the same perfect service, instant starting, smoother running, and what I have saved in gasoline these last few years has brought other luxuries which I could not have afforded previously."

Car owners all over the world are saving money every day with the Whirlwind, besides having better operating motors. Think what this means on your own car. Figure up your savings—enough for a radio—a bank account—added pleasures. Why let the Oil Companies profit by your waste? Find out about this amazing little device that will pay for itself every few weeks in gas saving alone.

FITS ALL CARS

In just a few minutes the Whirlwind can be installed on any make of car, truck or tractor. It's actually less work than changing your oil or putting water in the battery. No drilling, tapping or changes of any kind necessary. It is guaranteed to work perfectly on any make of car, truck or tractor, large or small, new model or old model. The more you drive the more you will save.

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GUARANTEE

No matter what kind of a car you have—no matter how big a gas eater it is—the Whirlwind will save you money. We absolutely guarantee that the Whirlwind will more than save its cost in gasoline alone within thirty days, or the trial will cost you nothing. We invite you to test it at our risk and expense. You are to be the sole judge.

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999-193A. Third Street, Milwaukee, Wis.

Gentlemen: You may send me full particulars of your Whirlwind Carbureting device and free trial offer. This does not obligate me in any way whatever.

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[ ] Check here if you are interested in full or part time salesmen position.

(Continued from page 438)

on the vampire too often for my complete satisfaction, but this one story was different, and beautifully done."

"With so many good writers in WEIRD TALES it is hard to choose which is the best," writes J. O. Feil, of Melbourne, Australia, "but I certainly think Seabury Quinn is amongst the best. Would it be out of place if I were to suggest a story dealing with prehistoric man in France or Spain? There have been found sufficiently weird implements and anthropomorphic designs in the grottoes to give a good foundation, apart from the fact that the earliest traces of witchcraft are to be found in the caves of Spain."

N. J. O'Neail, of Toronto, writes: "Edmond Hamilton has made me a convert to pseudo-science fiction, for which I never cared until I started reading his stories three years ago in WEIRD TALES. Murray Leinster's *The Murderer* in your latest issue is also a fine piece of writing, and Lieutenant Edgar Gardiner has a delightfully crisp and breezy style."

Harold Markham, author of *The Falling Knife* and *In a Dead Man's Shoes*, writes from England: "I would like to take this opportunity to write an Eyrie letter of appreciation of your most eery of magazines. I will not presume to criticize the stories—I hardly think a brother-writer should do so—beyond saying that I most emphatically prefer Seabury Quinn and hope that if ever I find myself on your side of the Atlantic it will be possible for me to make a pilgrimage to Brooklyn and that ingenious gentleman's acquaintance. One suggestion, however, I would venture to make: the cover! There is here in England, I am sure, a market for weird stories; but the kind of people that enjoy being harrowed by vampires, etc., are just the very kind who would shy at the *exterior* of WEIRD TALES. What I mean is that a casual glance at your cover suggests nothing more nor less than sex appeal of the most lurid description—and that would put the average purchaser dead off; while a 'sexy' sort of chap would buy your magazine in anticipation of a pleasing excitement of his passions, only to fling it aside, disappointed. I am sure the public for weird tales is here in England, and equally sure that, staying in hotels, I have frequently removed the cover of my W. T. before venturing to read it in the public lounge!"

A letter from Vincent Jones, of Long Beach, California, says: "I have been reading WEIRD TALES about two years and I never miss a number. The moment I snatch it from a news stand, even before I hand over my quarter, I look to see if there is a story by Seabury Quinn. I love him. One of the finest stories I have ever read was *The Murderer*, by Murray Leinster."

"I am taking this opportunity to express my appreciation of your remarkable magazine," writes N. Y. Smith, of Walsenburg, Colorado, in a letter to the Eyrie. "I've missed only a few issues in the past few years. Even though some of its strange contents 'goes over my head,' it holds my interest like nothing else readable—so different from the common everyday fiction. I

(Continued on page 442)

"I Had a Waistline Like His. I Got Rid of It in Less Than 35 Days-

"I reduced from 48 inches to 38 inches in 35 days," says R. E. Johnson of Akron, O., "just by wearing a Director Belt. My stomach is now firm, doesn't sag and I feel fine."

LET us prove to you, without you risking a penny, that you can quickly, easily and surely rid yourself of a bulging waistline. Let us prove that you can instantly redistribute the excess fat in such a way that the pulling-down weight is removed from the muscle structure of the stomach and properly placed where it is correctly supported, giving you freedom of movement and natural grace you have not known for years.

Slip the DIRECTOR *On—That's All*

The Director is made to your measure all in one piece, of finest mercerized web elastic. There are no buckles, laces or straps to bother with. It is light and compact and is worn with perfect ease and comfort. You are not troubled with sagging trousers, vest creeping up and wrinkled coat in business hours. It improves any man's appearance in a dress suit.

With every step you take, with every movement of the body, the Director gently kneads and massages the abdominal muscles, dispersing the fatty deposits until they are finally absorbed. The tension on the stretched and flabby muscles is relieved, for the heavy abdomen is actually supported from the back. The muscle structure in front is held firmly, strengthened and restored. The constant, gentle massaging permits no more fat to form.

You Take No Risk Whatever

"It's comfortable and I like it," is a statement made in hundreds of letters in our files. Let us prove our claims. We will send a Director for trial. If you don't get results you owe nothing.

Use the coupon below, or just write a postcard asking for our free trial offer, and we will include descriptive literature, doctors' endorsements, instructions for self-measurement and letters from Director wearers.

FREE TRIAL OFFER

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No need of carrying excess fat like this

Waistline is inches thinner with Director

MAIL Coupon Now

This coupon brings details Send for this booklet today

LANDON & WARNER

Dept. C-76 332 S. LaSalle, Chicago

Gentlemen: Without cost or obligation on my part please send me details of your trial offer and free booklet.

Name.....

Street.....

City.....*State*.....

(Continued from page 440)

like E. Hoffmann Price. You reprinted in your December issue his *Stranger from Kurdistan;* it is good, but *The Peacock's Shadow* a few years back was an even better story. Can't we persuade Mr. Price to write more of that type of tales? I like Gaston Leroux and Seabury Quinn and all of your highly intellectual family of authors."

Joseph Towich, of Allentown, Pennsylvania, writes to the Eyrie: "I have been reading WEIRD TALES for over five years and have yet to find one issue that I did not enjoy. Of course some of the stories went over bigger with me than others; that is only natural, as you have 'em mixed, and that is the reason for this letter. Keep 'em mixed—give us all a break. Those birds with their 'I want this kind, I want that kind' make me tired. They admit they like this one and that one; then they had something for their quarter, didn't they? Then why the kick? Don't they realize there are others who don't happen to like their kind? Now I like stories like *The Fearsome Touch of Death* by Robert E. Howard in the February issue, but I'm not squawking to have 'em all on that line. Gentlemen, you have no right to publish just *my* kind, for the other fellow's quarter is just as good as mine."

"I've just discovered WEIRD TALES," writes Dick Davids, of National City, California. "A friend told me about it, and lent me his copy of the December issue. I've always read a lot of these Western story magazines, but I'm getting tired of them. You can believe me, I sure enjoyed WEIRD TALES. It seemed to me the best story I read in your magazine was *The Dancer in the Crystal.* That was great. I've never read such a fascinating story before. I am a WEIRD TALES reader for life now!"

MY FAVORITE STORIES IN THE APRIL WEIRD TALES ARE:

Story	Remarks
(1)_____	_____
(2)_____	_____
(3)_____	_____

I do not like the following stories:

(1)_____ Why? _____

(2)_____ _____

It will help us to know what kind of stories you want in Weird Tales if you will fill out this coupon and mail it to The Eyrie, Weird Tales, 840 N. Michigan Ave., Chicago, Ill.

Reader's name and address:

_____

_____

_____

Thrillers Prove Good Nerve Tonic

Editorial in the New York Times

Detective Stories as Nerve Tonic

Many big business men, lawyers and statesmen have admitted a fondness for detective stories because of the distraction which they afford. Now it appears that there is still another good reason for indulging a taste for thrilling mystery tales. According to a prescription being worked out in the psychological laboratories of the University of Chicago, blood-and-thunder fiction is an ideal sedative for the high-pressure worker.

A research worker is demonstrating this theory by thoroughly scientific means, using graphs of pulse, charts of respiration and other exact data. After an hour's reading of a thriller, the subjects invariably show "a quieter pulse, a slower respiration and greater self-control." The experimenter hopes to prove that the reading of absorbing fiction is one of the best of nerve tonics.

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ON ICY KINARTH

by *Frank Belknap Long, Jr.*

I dreamt I stood upon a buttressed ledge
Of Icy Kinarth. High above my head
Soared lizard-birds, and bats with wings outspread,
And loathsome tails that swept the mountain's edge.

A thousand rods below me streamed the sea,
Its black waves lapping at the Isles of Spice:
I clung in terror to a blasted tree,
And fought for footing on the slippery ice.

There came at last, by scent or instinct led,
A fleshless thing with glazed, malignant eyes:
It pawed my mouth until its claws were red,
And voiced its ire in sharp, metallic cries:
A dry and corpsy gargoyle-shape that fed
Its belly with the refuse of the skies.

NEXT MONTH

A wealth of fascinating and unusual stories is scheduled for the May issue of WEIRD TALES, on sale April 1.

The Brain-Thief

by Seabury Quinn

An almost unthinkably weird situation provides a tragic background for the rapier-like intelligence and occult powers of the brilliant little French scientist, Jules de Grandin.

Light-Echoes

by Everil Worrell

An unusual occult-scientific story by the author of "The Bird of Space"—a weird tale that goes beyond Einstein in the daring audacity of its science.

The End of the Story

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A strange tale about Nycea, the lamia who had her dwelling-place beneath the ruins of the Castle of Faussesflammes—a weirdly beautiful story.

The Sun People

by Edmond Hamilton

A thrilling novelette about a race of people living in the interior of a gigantic sun—a startling weird-scientific story of a tremendous doom threatening the universe.

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by Earl L. Bell

A strange fantasy, a bizarre extravaganza about a weird and wonderful country, and the terrible beings that beset it.

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by G. G. Pendarves

Back from the gates of hell came Jerry's grandfather—a grim story of black magic and evil rites.

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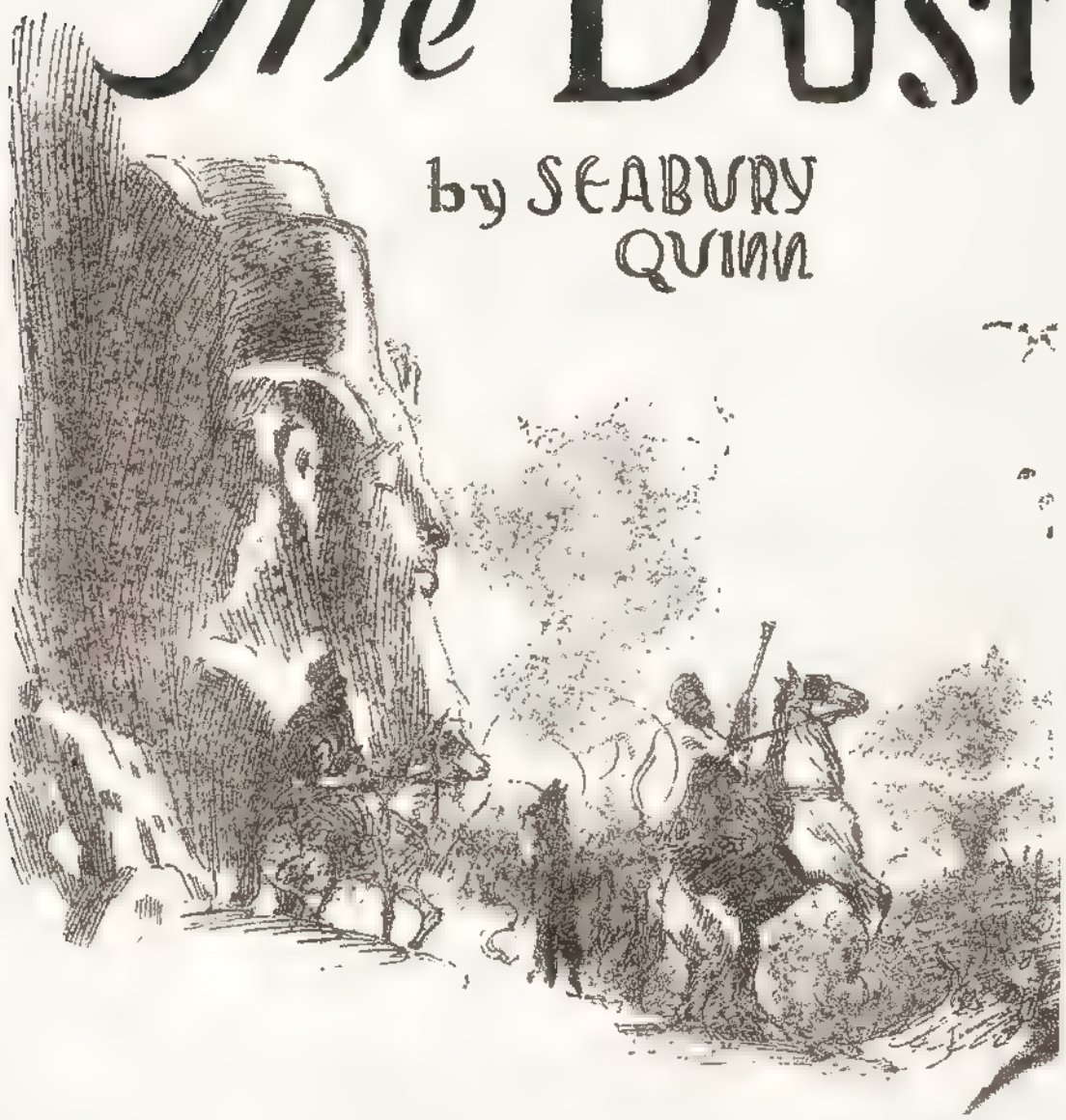
WEIRD TALES, 840 N. Michigan Ave. Chicago, Ill.

The Dust

by SEABURY QUINN



IT WAS an odd couple Nora McGinnis ushered into my drawing-room that snowy February night. The man was good-looking, extraordinarily so, with fine, regular features crowned by a mass of dark hair, broad forehead and deep, greenish-hazel eyes set well apart beneath brows of almost startling blackness. His chest was deep and well developed, and his wide, square shoulders told of strength and stamina beyond the usual. Yet he was scarcely more than five feet tall, and the trousers of his well-tailored dinner suit hung baggily on limbs shriveled to mere skeletal proportions. His right knee bent awkwardly at a fixed, unchanging angle which made his walk little more than a lurching,

# of Egypt

"Men who had fought with Grant and Sherman and Farragut weren't the kind to be stopped by unorganized Arabs."

painful hobble, and the patent leather oxfords on his feet were almost boyish in their smallness. Obviously, poliomyelitis had ravaged his once splendid body hideously, leaving a man half perfect, half pitiable wreck.

The woman, apparently almost of an age with her companion—somewhere near twenty-five, I judged—was in everything but deformity his perfect feminine counterpart. Close as a skullcap of black satin her mannishly shingled, jetty hair lay against her small, well-shaped head; her features were so small and regular as to be almost insignificant by reason of their very symmetry; her walk was one of those smooth, undulant gaits which announce a nervous balance and muscular co-ordination not often found in this neurotic age. A sleeveless evening frock of black net and satin fell in graceful folds almost to her narrow, high-arched insteps, and

the tiny emerald buttons decorating her black-satin pumps were matched by the emerald studs set in the lobes of her small ears and, oddly, by the greenish lights in her black-fringed hazel eyes. She was devoid of make-up, save the vivid scarlet of her lips.

I examined the two small oblongs of cardboard Nora had handed me before admitting the visitors. "Mr. Monteith?" I asked tentatively.

"I am he," the young man answered with a quick smile which lighted his somber, brooding countenance with a peculiar charm, "and this is my sister, Louella." He paused a moment, as though embarrassed, then:

"We've been told you have a friend, a Dr. de Grandin, who occasionally interests himself in matters which have, or seem to have, a supernatural aspect. If you would be good enough to tell us how we might get in touch with him——"

"*Avec beaucoup de félicité!*" Jules de Grandin interrupted with a laugh. "Stretch forth your hand, and touch, *mon ami;* I am he whom you seek!"

"Ah?" young Monteith stared at the little Frenchman, scarcely knowing how to acknowledge the unusual introduction. "Ah——"

"*Précisément,*" de Grandin assented as he waved the callers to a seat upon the fireside lounge. "We are very well met, I think; this had promised to be a dull evening. Now, regarding this seemingly so supernatural matter concerning which you would consult Jules de Grandin——" he raised his narrow, black brows till they described twin Saracenic arches and paused expectantly.

Young Monteith ran his hand over his smoothly brushed black hair and directed a look almost of appeal at the little Frenchman. "I hardly know how to begin," he confessed, then cast a puzzled glance about the room, as though seeking inspiration from the Dresden figurines on the mantelpiece.

"Why not at the beginning?" de Grandin suggested pleasantly as he drew out his slim gold cigarette case, courteously proffered it to the visitors, then held his pocket lighter for them to set the tobacco alight.

"The case concerns my uncle—our uncle's—death," Mr. Monteith replied as he expelled a cloud of fragrant gray smoke from his nostrils. "It may have been natural enough—the death certificate read heart failure, and there were no legal complications—but both my sister and I are puzzled, and if you can spare the time to investigate it, we'd—here," he broke off, drawing a thin packet of papers from his inside pocket, "this is a copy of Uncle Absalom's will; we might as well start with it as anything."

The little Frenchman took the sheets of foolscap with their authenticating red seals and held them to the light.

"In the Name of God, Amen," he read: "I, Absalom Barnstable"—Barn-stable, *mon Dieu,* what a name!—"being of sound and disposing mind and memory and in full bodily vigor, yet being certain of the near approach of unescapable and inevitable doom, do hereby make, publish and declare this, my last will and testament, hereby revoking any and all other will or wills by me at any time heretofore made.

"First—I commend my spirit to the keeping of God my Savior, and my body to be buried in my plot in Vale Cemetery.

"Second——"

"You can skip the second, third and fourth paragraphs," Mr. Monteith interrupted; "the fifth is the only one bearing further on our problem."

"Very well," de Grandin turned the page and continued: "Fifth—And it is my will and desire that my said nephew and niece, David and Louella Monteith, aforesaid, do take up residence in my house near Harrisonville, New Jersey, as soon as they shall be

apprised of the provisions hereof, and shall there remain in residence for the full term of six months, and at the end of that time, *unless intervening occurrences shall have prompted them to take such action earlier*, or unless it shall have become physically impossible so to do, they shall remove from the said house the mummy of the Priest Sepa and see it safely transported overseas and buried in the sands of the Egyptian desert; and I do especially make the faithful carrying-out of these injunctions conditions precedent to their succession to the residuum of my estate."

De Grandin finished reading and glanced from the brother to the sister with his odd, unwinking stare.

"We are the residuary legatees of Uncle Absalom's estate," David Monteith explained. "It amounts to something like $300,000."

"*Parbleu*, for half that sum I should undertake the interment of all the shriveled mummies in the necropolis of Thebes!" the Frenchman returned. "But where is the *outré* feature of your case, my friends? True, your estimable uncle seems to have been peculiar, but eccentricity is the privilege of age and wealth. Why should you not make yourselves comfortable in his late dwelling for half a year, then bury the so long dead Egyptian gentleman with fitting honors and thereafter enjoy yourselves in any manner seeming good to you?"

It was the girl who answered. "Dr. de Grandin," she asked in a charmingly modulated contralto voice, "didn't you notice the odd phraseology in the opening paragraph of Uncle Absalom's will? If he had said 'being certain of the near approach of unescapable and inevitable *death*' we should have paid little attention to it, for he was past eighty years old, and even though he seemed strong and active as a man of sixty, death couldn't have been so far away in the natural course of things; but he didn't say 'death', he said 'unescapable and inevitable *doom*'."

"*Exactement*," de Grandin agreed calmly, but the sudden light which shone in his little round blue eyes betrayed awaking interest. "*Précisément, Mademoiselle;* what then?"

"I'm certain that horrible old mummy he mentions in his will had something to do with it," she shot back in a low, almost breathless voice. "Show him the transcription, David," she ordered, turning to her brother.

Mr. Monteith produced a second paper from his pocket. "Louella found this in an old escritoire in the library the day before Uncle Absalom died," he explained. "She meant to ask him about it, but never got the chance. It may shed some light on the case—to you. It only makes it more mysterious to us."

"Transcription of the Tablet found in the Tomb of Sepa the Priest," de Grandin read:

"Sepa, servant and priest of Aset, the All-Mother, Who Is and Was and Is to Be, to whoso looks hereon, greeting and admonition:

"Impious stranger, who hast defiled the sanctuary of my sepulcher, be thou accursed. Be thy uprisings and thy down-lyings accursed; accursed be thy goings-out and thy returnings; cursed be thou in labor and in rest; may thy nights be filled with terrifying visions and thy days with travail and with pain, and may the wrath of Aset, who Was and Is and Is to Be, be on thee and on thy house for all time. May thy body be the prey to kites and jackals and thy soul endure the torture of the Gods. Unburied shalt thou die, and bodiless and accursed shalt thou wander in Amenti forever and forever, and be this malediction on thee and on thy house until such time as my relics be once again interred in the sands of Khem. I have said."

"*Eh bien*, he cursed a vicious curse, this one," the Frenchman re-

marked as he concluded. "And what is this we have here?"

Pasted to the bottom of the sheet bearing the translation of the old priest's curse was a newspaper cutting bearing a London dateline:

London, Nov. 16.—The strange death of Richard Bethell, son of Lord Westbury, today revived the legend of the curse of death that hovers over those who disturb the graves of the ancient lords of Egypt.

His death is the tenth among the leaders of Lord Carnarvon's expedition to the Valley of the Kings in Egypt, which uncovered the tomb of King Tutankhamen.

Bethell, who was secretary to Howard Carter, leader of the expedition, was found dead in bed in the aristocratic Bath Club. Physicians are at a loss as to what caused his end.

"U'M?" de Grandin put the paper down and regarded the visitors once more with his direct, level stare. "And what of your late uncle?" he demanded. "Tell me what you can of his life; more particularly of his death."

Again it was the girl who answered. "Uncle Absalom was educated for the Unitarian ministry," she began, "but he never accepted the vocation. About the time he was to take up his ministerial work he met a young lady in New Bedford, Massachusetts, and fell violently in love with her. Yankee clippers still traded with the Orient and Near East in those days, and Miss Goodrich's father, who was a ship-owner, offered Uncle Absalom a share in the business if he would give up his clerical career. He shipped as supercargo on the *Polly Hatton* at his future father-in-law's suggestion, and in the course of a three-year cruise touched at Alexandria, Egypt.

"He seems to have had plenty of time to go inland exploring, for he made a trip up the Nile and with a party of Arabs broke into a tomb somewhere near Luxor and brought back several mummies, some papyri and some funerary statues. It was comparatively easy to get such things out of Egypt in those days, so Uncle had little difficulty in bringing his finds—or would you call them loot?—away. Oddly enough, they proved the foundation of his fortune.

"Unknown to Uncle Absalom and the master of the ship, Mr. Goodrich had died of smallpox while the *Polly Hatton* was on her cruise, and when they came to appraise his estate he was found to be practically bankrupt. Harriet, his daughter, married a wealthy young ship-chandler, and was the mother of two children when her 'fiancé' finally returned to New Bedford.

"But the mummies Uncle Absalom had found proved rather valuable ones. Egyptology was just beginning to be the important science it is today, and the papyri found in the mummy-cases gave a great deal of valuable information the officials of the British Museum had only guessed at before. They paid Uncle £200—a great deal of money in those days—for his finds, and made him a liberal offer for any further antiquities he might bring them.

"When Uncle Absalom returned to New England to find his expected bride already a wife and mother, his entire nature seemed to change almost overnight. The quiet, bookish divinity student was transformed into a desperate adventurer. The Civil War had been over five years, and the country was beginning to drift into the period of hard times which ended in the panic of 1873. Plenty of young men who'd served in the Union army and navy were out of work, and Uncle Absalom had no trouble recruiting a company of followers without respect either for danger or decency, provided there was money to be had for their work.

"Poor Uncle Absalom! I'm afraid everything he did during the next twenty years or so wouldn't bear too close scrutiny! The returns from his first venture in grave robbery had

proved so good that he went into it as a business.

"Even though most of them were Mohammedans and didn't believe in the old gods, the Egyptians didn't take kindly to foreigners despoiling the ancient tombs, and Uncle and his men encountered resistance more than once; but the men who had fought with Grant and Sherman and Farragut weren't the kind to be stopped by unorganized Arabs, or even by the newly organized gendarmerie of Egypt. They robbed and plundered systematically, taking their loot to a sort of buccaneers' cache they'd established at a desert oasis, and when they'd accumulated enough spoil to make it worth while, they'd take it out in an armed caravan, sometimes striking for the Red Sea, sometimes going boldly to the Mediterranean, and wo betide whoever tried to stop them!

"Of course, both the English and the French went through the motions of combatting this wholesale grave-robbery, but both countries had more important things to attend to, and Uncle's men helped them subdue rebellious natives more than once; so many of his crimes were winked at officially. Also, the great museums of London, Paris, Berlin and St. Petersburg were glad to buy whatever he had for sale, and often bid against each other for his wares; so he grew rich and, in a way, respected. The curators of those museums weren't so very different from people over here," she added with a smile. "When I was in school in Washington it was common gossip that the Senators and Congressmen who championed prohibition most eloquently in the halls of Congress were the bootleggers' best customers in private life.

"What had started as a purely commercial enterprise with the additional element of adventure to help him forget the way he had been jilted at length became a real passion with Uncle Absalom. He learned to decipher the Egyptian hieroglyphics, for he'd been a first-rate Greek scholar in college and Boussard's discovery of the Rosetta Stone in 1799 had furnished the key to the old written language, you know. Long before he retired from his dangerous profession Uncle was rated as one of the foremost authorities on both ancient and modern Egypt, and two universities and the British government made him handsome offers for his services when he finally gave up tomb-robbing as a vocation.

"On his retirement he made a number of gifts to the Egyptian departments of the museums which had been his best customers, but the cream of his finds he retained for his private collection and kept them in his house near Harrisonville.

"I don't suppose you ever even heard of him, Dr. Trowbridge?" she turned her odd, rather melancholy smile on me. "He's lived just outside town for almost ten years, but when we came to visit him the taxi-driver had never heard of 'Journey's End', where he lived, and we had a great deal of trouble finding him. You see, he had hardly been outside his own grounds once since settling here, and most of his things, including staple groceries, he bought from a mail order house in Chicago. I don't believe half a dozen people in the whole city knew him, or even knew of him.

"David and I came to visit him last month in response to an urgent invitation. He intimated he intended making us his heirs, and as we're orphans and were his only living relatives, it seemed no more than human charity to accede to his request.

"He was a wonderful-looking old man, courteous, gentle and very learned. He did everything possible to make us welcome, and we should have been very happy at 'Journey's End' if it hadn't been for an air of —well—uncanniness, which seemed to permeate the whole place. Somehow,

both David and I seemed to feel alien presences there. We'd be reading in the library, or sitting at table, or, perhaps, just going about our affairs in the house, when suddenly we'd have that strange, eery feeling of someone staring fixedly at the backs of our heads. When we'd turn suddenly—as we always did at first—there'd be no one there, of course; but the feeling was always there, and instead of wearing off it became stronger and stronger. Since Uncle's death I've noticed it more than David has, though.

"Uncle Absalom never mentioned it, and, of course, neither did we—except to each other—but I'm sure he felt it too, for there was a furtive, almost fearful, look in his eyes all the time, and the queer, haunted expression seemed to grow on him, just during the little time of our visit. It was only ten days before his death when he made his will, and you remember how he speaks of 'unescapable and inevitable *doom*'—instead of 'death'—in the opening paragraph.

"Now, I realize all this is not enough to excuse our belief in anything supernatural being involved in Uncle Absalom's death; that is, not enough to convince a disinterested third party who hadn't felt the queer, terrifying atmosphere of 'Journey's End' and seen the look of hopeless fear grow into an expression of almost resignation in Uncle Absalom's face," she admitted, "and I'm not sure you'll see anything so very unusual in what occurred the night he died. David will have to tell you about that; curiously enough, though everyone else in the house was awake, I slept through it all, and have no first-hand knowledge of anything."

"I compliment you, *Mademoiselle*," de Grandin declared with one of his characteristically courteous bows. "You tell your story most exceedingly well. Already I am convinced. I shall most gladly undertake the case.

"Now, young *Monsieur*," he addressed the crippled boy, "add what you can to the so graphic narrative *Mademoiselle* your sister has detailed. I listen; I am all attention."

DAVID MONTEITH took up the story. "Uncle Absalom died shortly after New Year's—the ninth of January, to be exact," he began. "He and Louella had gone to bed about ten o'clock, but I stayed up in the library reading. It's—pardon the personal reference—it's rather difficult for me to dress and undress, and sometimes I sit up rather late, just to defer the trouble of going to bed. So——"

"It hurts him," his sister interrupted, her eyes welling with tears. "Sometimes he suffers terribly, and——"

"Louella, dear, don't!" the boy cut in. "As I was saying, gentlemen, I sat up late that night, and fell asleep over my book. I woke with a start and found the night, which had been clear and sharp earlier, had become stormy and bitter cold. A perfect gale was blowing, and soft, clinging snowflakes were being dashed against the window-panes with such force that they struck the glass with an audible impact.

"Just what wakened me I can't say with certainty. I thought at first it was the shrieking of the wind, but, looking back, I'm not so sure; for, blending with the recollection of the dream I'd been having when I woke, was a sound, or combination of sounds——"

"*Mille pardons, Monsieur*, but what of this dream?" de Grandin interrupted. "Such stuff as dreams are made on are oftentimes of greatest importance in cases like this."

"Why," David Monteith colored slightly, "it was a silly hodgepodge I'd been dreaming, sir; it couldn't possibly have any bearing on what happened later. I dreamed I heard two people, a man and a woman, come up the stairs from Uncle Absalom's museum, which was on the

ground floor, and pass the library on their way to Uncle's room. And in the absurd way dreams have of making things appear, I thought I could look right through the solid wall and see them, the way you do in those illusional scenes they sometimes have in the theater. They were both dressed in ancient Egyptian costume, and were speaking together in some outlandish language. I'd been reading Munzinger's *Ostafrikanische Studien* when I fell asleep; I expect that accounts for the dream."

"U'm; possibly," de Grandin conceded. "What then, if you please?"

"Well, as I said, when I woke I thought I heard a sort of soft, but very clear, chiming sound, something like sleigh-bells heard a long way off, yet different, somehow, and with it what I took to be a woman's voice singing softly.

"I leaned back in my chair, half asleep still, wondering if some dream-image hadn't carried over into my semi-consciousness, when there came a new sound, totally unlike the others.

"It was my Uncle Absalom's voice, not very loud, but terribly earnest, arguing with, or pleading with someone. Gradually, as I sat there listening, his words became louder, he almost shouted, then broke off with a sort of scream which seemed to die half uttered, as though his mouth had suddenly been stopped or his throat grasped in a strangling hold.

"I lifted myself out of my chair and hurried toward the upper story as well as I could, but the stairway leading to the third floor was some twenty feet down the corridor and the stairs were steep and winding; so, with my handicap, I couldn't make very good time.

"While I was still half climbing, half crawling up the stairs, I heard a woman's scream, 'Howly Mither, 'tis th' banshee!' and recognized Maggie Gourlay, my uncle's cook and housekeeper. She and her husband, Tom, were his only servants, and shared all the household duties between them.

"When I finally reached the landing above, Maggie stood at the far end of the hall, her teeth fairly chattering, her eyes bulging with terror.

" 'Ouch, Misther David, 'tis all over wid Misther Absalom, God rist 'im!' she hailed me as I came up. ' 'Tis meself just seen th' banshee woman lave 'is room. Don't go nigh, Misther David; she may be waitin' fer others o' th' family.'

" 'Nonsense,' I panted. 'Didn't you hear my uncle call? Come here; we must see what he wants.'

"Wurra, wurra, 'tis nothin' but a praste an' an undertaker he'll be nadin' now, sor!' she answered, without coming a step nearer.

"I couldn't wait for the superstitious old fool to get over her hysteria, for my uncle might be seriously ill, I thought; so I rapped sharply on his door, then, receiving no answer, pushed my way into his room.

"Uncle Absalom lay on his bed, the covers thrown back, one foot hanging just off the floor, as though he had been in the act of rising. His arms were folded over his breast, his fingers locked together, clasping a pillow tightly against his chest and face.

"I switched on the light and removed the pillow; then I knew. I'd never seen a newly dead man before, but I needed no one to tell me my uncle was dead. I think we recognize death instinctively, just as a child recognizes and hates a snake without having been told reptiles are deadly. My uncle's jaw had sagged and his tongue had fallen forward and outward, as though he were making an inane grimace, and there was a bright, transparent film over his still opened eyes.

"I turned back his pajama jacket to feel his heart, and then it was I noticed the mark. It was just to the

right of his left breast, a sort of deep purple, like a discolored bruise or a St. Andrew's birthmark, less than an inch high, and faintly raised, like the wale left by a whiplash. Here''—the young man leaned forward, took a slender gold pencil from his pocket and drew a design on the margin of his uncle's will—"it was like this:"

"*Mordieu,* do you say it?" de Grandin exclaimed in a low, tense voice. "*Barbe d'un singe, c'est le plus étrange!*"

"Something else I noticed, though at the time it made little impression on me," Monteith continued: "There was a distinct odor of spice or incense —almost the odor you find in a Catholic church after services—in the room. It wasn't till considerably later, when I began rearranging my recollections, that I recalled it.

"Once I'd made sure Uncle Absalom was dead, Maggie and Tom seemed to have no more fear. They came into the room, helped me arrange his body, then assisted me down the hall to find Louella. She'd slept through it all, and I had to hammer on her door to waken her."

"You, *Monsieur?*" de Grandin asked. "Did not the servants knock?"

"Why''—the young man seemed to catch his breath as sudden recollection struck him—"why no; they didn't.

"D'ye know, Dr. de Grandin," he leaned toward the little Frenchman in his earnestness, "I believe they kept behind me purposely. At the time I thought nothing of it, but since you asked me about who knocked on Louella's door, I distinctly remember Tom held me under one arm and Maggie under the other, but both walked a little behind me, and both stood back when we halted at my sister's room."

"U'm?" de Grandin murmured. "And then what, if you please?"

"When Louella finally woke and let us in, she seemed so sleepy I had to shake her to make her understand what had happened. At first she just looked uncomprehendingly at me and kept repeating whatever I said to her in a dreamy, singsong voice."

"U'm?" de Grandin murmured again. "And——"

"By George, yes! Now I think of it, there was that same scent of incense in her room, too. I'm positive it wasn't in the hall or anywhere else; just in Uncle's room and hers."

"*Tiens,* at any rate, it was the odor of sanctity you smelled," the Frenchman returned with a chuckle. "Now, concerning this so strange mark you found upon *Monsieur* your uncle's breast. Was it——"

"I was coming to that," Monteith interrupted. "As soon as we could, we got in touch with the nearest physician, Dr. Canby. He came about an hour later, examined Uncle Absalom's body, and gave a certificate of death by heart failure.

"I asked him about the mark and wanted to know if, in his opinion, it had any significance. He just looked at me and asked, 'What mark?'

"We argued about it for a while, and both of us lost our tempers a little, I think. Finally, distasteful as it was, I went into Uncle's room, unbuttoned his sleeping-jacket and pointed to his breast."

"Yes, and then?" de Grandin demanded, leaning toward the narrator, his little eyes fairly aglow with anticipation.

"Nothing," Monteith returned in dull, anticlimactic voice. "There was nothing there. The mark had disappeared."

"*A-a-ah?*" de Grandin let his breath out slowly between his teeth as he leaned back in his chair.

"But, Dave, are you *sure* you saw that mark on Uncle's flesh?" the girl asked gently. "In the excitement and the poor light, mightn't you have imagined——"

"No," the young man answered positively. "I'm certain it was there when I found Uncle Absalom, and just as certain it had disappeared when I looked the second time."

"*Mais oui, Mademoiselle,*" de Grandin put in. "*Monsieur* your brother is undoubtlessly right. This business, it promises interest. Dr. Trowbridge and I shall do ourselves the honor of calling on you tomorrow or as soon thereafter as may be."

WE SAT long before the fire after David and Louella Monteith had gone. The Frenchman smoked cigarette after cigarette in moody silence, staring at the leaping flames in the fireplace as fixedly as a crystal-gazer seeking inspiration from his globe. At length:

"Friend Trowbridge, it is most remarkable, is it not?" he demanded abruptly.

"What?" I answered.

"That sign, that stigma on Monsieur the Grave-Robber's breast."

"Why, yes," I agreed. "It is odd it should have showed a few moments after death, then disappeared. I wonder, after all, if the girl was right. Young David *might* have imagined it, and——"

"*Non,*" he cut in. "The disappearance is the least mystifying phenomenon of all. It is of its form I speak. Did not you recognize it?"

"Why, no. It looked something like the conventionalized outline of a boot to me, but——"

"Ah bah," he exclaimed, "that sign, my friend, was the ideograph standing for the Goddess Aset, or, as she is better known to us, Isis, whom the Egyptians of old knew as the All-Mother. She Who Was and Is and Is to Be. It was she whom the priest Sepa, who so violently cursed the despoilers of his tomb, served, you will remember."

"Well——"

"Exactly, precisely, quite so; I damn think we shall see interesting things before he have done with this matter, my friend."

Early next morning he set off to visit the old priest in charge of the local Greek Orthodox Church. I stopped by the rectory something after four o'clock in the afternoon, and together we set out to visit the Monteiths.

2

"JOURNEY'S END," the quaint old Georgian house where Absalom Barnstable had spent the closing uneventful decade of his adventurous life and finally met mysterious death, was three stories high, flat-roofed, not particularly beautiful, and unexpectedly comfortable. Built of time-mellowed red brick with slightly discolored facings of white stone, it stood a dozen yards or so back from the Albemarle Pike, in the sparsely settled country lying ten miles east of Harrisonville. An iron railing, ornamented with faces, javelins and twining garlands, after the fashion of the late eighties, divided the front yard from the road, and on each side of the door, which was approached by three white-stone steps, grew a small privet tree neatly clipped and trimmed into a pyramid of dull, rich green.

The entire ground floor, with the exception of kitchen, pantry and furnace room, was given over to a museum for housing the late owner's antiquities. Partitions separating the big, high-ceiled rooms had been knocked out, and the major part of the story made into one great storehouse of curios—brightly painted mummy-cases, glass-fronted cabinets containing bits of ancient *ucrtu,* and tall, mahogany wardrobes, each furnished with secure locks, storing such relics as were not for open display.

The second story contained a large, old-fashioned formal drawing-room, a library with walls lined from baseboard to molding with book-laden shelves, and an open fireplace of almost baronial proportions, a dining-room vast as a banquet hall, and two guest-bedrooms, each with private bath. Sleeping-quarters for the family and servants and two large lumber rooms occupied the top floor.

Old Tom Gourlay, butler and majordomo of the establishment, met us at the gate and helped us with our luggage when we arrived at the house shortly before six in the evening. Behind him, in the lower entrance-way, waited his wife, Maggie, looking very demure in her black bombazine dress and white apron, but an expression of lurking suspicion—a certain grimness about her lips and hardness in her eyes—made me glance sharply at her a second time as we followed her husband up the wide stairway to the library where our host and hostess waited.

The Frenchman noted the woman's odd air of constraint, too, for he whispered as we ascended, "She will bear watching, that one, Friend Trowbridge."

Dinner was served shortly after our arrival, and despite de Grandin's efforts at small talk the meal proved a gloomy one, for we caught ourselves looking furtively at each other from under lowered lids, and though the old butler maintained his air of well-bred, stoical calm, on more than one occasion I caught a glimpse of Maggie Gourlay standing at the serving-pantry door, her queer, hard gaze fixed intently on Louella Monteith's sleek, bowed head.

Shortly after coffee had been served in the library de Grandin excused himself and, motioning me to accompany him, stole silently down the stairs. "The surest defense lies in attack, my friend," he explained as he led the way toward the kitchen. Then, as we entered the big, steamy room without preliminary knock, he demanded:

"Tell me, my friends, what was it you observed the night your unfortunate employer met his end?"

The servants started as though he had flung an accusation at them. Old Tom opened his lips, licked them lightly with the tip of his tongue, then closed them again and averted his eyes, like a sullen schoolboy chided by his teacher.

Not so his wife. An angry, challenging light shone in her Celtic blue eyes as she answered: "Why don't ye ask *her* about it, sor? She'll be better able ter tell ye than Tom or me, good Christians that we be."

"*Dites*," de Grandin pursed his lips, "is it an accusation that you make, my old one?"

"I'm making no accusations, an' I'm sayin' nothin' agin nobody," the woman returned sullenly, "leastwise, not widin hearin' distance of ears as miss nothin'. See here, sor"—she softened, as women always did when Jules de Grandin regarded them with that elfish, provocative smile of his—"ye're from th' other side; have ye ever been to Ireland—do ye know annything o' her fairy lore?"

"Ah-ho," de Grandin let his breath out with a half-chuckle, "the winds blows that way, *hein?* Yes, my excellent one, I have been to your so beautiful island, and I know much of her traditions. What is it you have seen which reminds you of the old sod?"

The woman hesitated, casting a half-defiant, half-fearful glance at the ceiling above her; then, confidentially: "What sort o' folk is it as can't call a name three times runnin' or eat three helpin's o' food at wan meal, or drink three sups o' drink?" she demanded with a sort of subdued ferocity.

The Frenchman met her earnest, searching stare with a level, unwinking look. "Fairy folk, and witches,

and ghosts of the departed who masquerade as living men," he answered glibly, as though reciting a lesson learned by rote. "Also those who have sold themselves to the Evil One, or they who have any manner of traffic with the Powers of Darkness——"

"True for ye, sor," she interrupted with a satisfied nod. "Ye're a gentleman, an' none o' these learned fools who laugh at th' old-time truths an' call 'em superstition. Then listen:

"When first they came here, th' crippled Misther David an' she who calls herself his sister, I wuz mightily afeared o' th' green eyes of her, an' of her pale, bloodless face an' her smilin' red lips, so thin an' cruel, wid th' white teeth flashin' so close behint 'em. So I sets a trap fer her. Whenever she wanted me, I pretended not to hear her call th' first time, nor th' second. Did she call twice? She did, sor. Did she call th' charmed third time? *Niver!*

"An', 'Tom,' sez I to me old man, 'do ye be watchin' how she eats an' drinks at table while ye're servin' th' dinners,' an' to make sure he wuzn't fooled be th' wicked, false beauty of her pale face, I climbs th' stairs an' watches her from th' servin'-panthry door meself. More than wanst I watched her, sor, but niver, as God an' th' blessed St. Patrick hear me spake, did I see her put th' third piece o' meat or bread in her mouth, nor did she ever take a third cup o' wine, though Tom at me express orders would fill her glass no more than half full, so she'd have all th' chanct a Christian woman needed ter ask for a third helpin' o' th' crater."

"U'm?" de Grandin tweaked the tightly waxed ends of his diminutive blond mustache. "And what else, if you please? The night your master died, by example——"

"Jest so, sor," she broke in eagerly. "'Twas afther we'd heard old Misther Abs'lom cry out in mortal anguish an' whilst Misther Davy—poor lad!—wuz clumpin' an' clompin' up th' stairs from th' libr'y below, we seen it come out from his room. All scairt an' terror-shook as we wuz, I hollered out that 'twas th' banshee that walked th' house be night, but 'twarn't, sor. 'Twuz her—or *it*—sor, as howly St. Bridget hears me say it, 'twas her!

"Sure, an' I seen her come sneakin' from out his door, wid her cruel, red lips parted in a divil's laugh an' her terrible green eyes shootin' fire at me through th' dark, freezin' me where I stood.

"Down th' hall she went, sor, so quiet-like ye'd have swore she floated, for niver mortal woman stepped so softly, an' when she turned th' corner o' th' corridor, I knew we'd seen an evil thing that night; a witch-woman from Kylenagranagh Hill, arrayed in th' likeness o' pore Misther Abs'lom's blood-kin. Then it wuz me lips wuz loosened, an' I called aloud ter Misther Davy to beware—fer who knew but that she looked fer more o' th' masther's blood to destroy, havin' a'ready kilt th' old man dead wid her magic power?"

"I DECLARE, I'm so sleepy I can scarcely keep my eyelids up!" Louella Monteith told us a few minutes after we rejoined her and her brother in the library upstairs. "I've not stirred from the house today, but I haven't been so drowsy since——" she broke off abruptly, her eyes widening with something like horror.

"Yes, *Mademoiselle?*" de Grandin prompted softly.

"Since the night Uncle Absalom died," she answered. "I was terribly drowsy from right after dinner that evening, too, and slept like a log from the moment I went to bed—remember what trouble David had to

waken me when he and the servants came to my room, to tell me——"

"*Précisément,*" de Grandin agreed. "By all means, *Mademoiselle,* do not let us keep you from your needed rest. Dr. Trowbridge and I are here to help, not to make nuisances of ourselves."

"You won't mind?" she asked gratefully as she rose to leave. "Good-night, gentlemen; good-night, Davy, dear; don't sit up too late, please."

Midnight sounded on the tall clock in the hall; still we talked and smoked in the library. David Monteith was widely read and widely traveled, and his flow of conversation was as interesting as it was varied in subject-matter. We were discussing some comic idiosyncrasies of Parisian *concierges* and taxi-drivers when de Grandin halted the talk with up-raised hand.

Quickly as a cat, and as silently, he stole to the door, motioning over his shoulder for me to shut off the library lights. A moment he stood silent in the doorway of the darkened room, then crept down the hall toward the stairs leading to the museum below.

Ten minutes or so later he rejoined us with a shamefaced smile. "Jules de Grandin grows old and nervous, I fear," he admitted with a humorous lift of his eyebrows. "He starts at shadows and hears ghostly footsteps in the creaking of old floor-boards. My friends, it is late. My vote is that we retire; do you agree?

"NON, my friend, it may not be," he denied as I prepared to disrobe shortly after we had bid our host good-night. "Remove the shoes, by all means; otherwise remain clothed. I fear we shall have small sleep this night."

"But," I protested, "I thought you were so sleepy. You said——"

"Assuredly," he agreed with a nod as he replaced his evening shoes with a pair of soft-soled slippers, "and the mother who would still her little one's fear declares she hears nothing when she is most certain she hears a burglar prying at the window-latch. Attend me, my friend:

"While you, Monsieur Monteith and I talked all pleasantly in the library I did descry the soft, so silent step of someone creeping down the stairs. At once I bid you shut off the light, that I might not stand out in silhouette against its glow and thus betray myself; then I did reconnoiter.

"All quietly down the stairway Mademoiselle Louella did steal, and to one of those great, fast-locked cabinets she went unerringly, though the museum was dark as Pluto's own subcellar.

"Today she told me she knew not where the keys of those locked cases were—that her late uncle had kept them in a secret place and that she knew it not—but with a key she did unlock that cabinet door, and though that key was one of many on a ring, she made no difficulty in finding it in the dark, or in fitting it to the lock. No.

"Anon she turned back, and on her arms and in her hands were many things; objects I could not certainly identify, but seeming to be articles of clothing and ornaments—grave-loot from the old ones' tombs, I doubt not, and worth a kingly ransom for their great antiquity, whatever their intrinsic worth might be."

"But why did you pretend you'd seen nothing?" I demanded. "Do you suspect——"

"I suspect nothing; I know nothing," he rejoined. "I declared my mission fruitless that the young *monsieur* might not have new perplexities added to those he already has. What sort of business Mademoiselle Louella makes—or purposes to make—I do not know. At any rate, her actions were most strange, and we shall be advised to sit with one eye and one ear fast-glued to our keyhole throughout the night."

3

WRAPPING myself in a dressing-gown, I dropped into one of the deep wing chairs flanking the bedroom fireplace and lighted a cigar.

Jules de Grandin paced the length of the chamber, lighted a cigarette and flung it aside after two or three puffs, drew something from the pocket of his lounge-robe and examined it, replaced it, finally seated himself on the extreme edge of the easy-chair across the hearth and seemed to freeze statue-still.

Once or twice I essayed a remark, but his quickly lifted hand cut me short each time. His attitude was one of intent listening for some expected sound, and I found myself thinking again how suggestive of a feline the little fellow was. With his round, blue eyes widened by the intentness of his attention, the sharp, needle-fine ends of his waxed mustache fairly quivering with nervous tautness and his delicate, narrow nostrils now and again expanding as though he would discover the presence of that for which he waited by virtue of his sense of smell, he was for all the world like a tensed, expectant, but infinitely patient tom-cat stationed at the entrance of a promising rathole.

Time crept by with weighted feet. I yawned, stretched myself, tossed away my cigar, and fell into a doze.

"Trowbridge, *mon vieux*, arouse!" de Grandin's sibilant whisper cut through my nap. "Awake, my friend—listen!"

In the room above us, the chamber where crippled David Monteith slept, there sounded the indistinct murmur of a voice—a woman's voice—and blending with it like a cunningly played accompaniment to a soloist's recitation was the faint, musical chiming of a bell. Yet it was not like any bell I had ever heard; rather it was like a staff of chimes with a single, tri-toned note, or a major note with two undertones pitched differently.

"Sounds like——" I began.

"*Zut!* Be quiet — come!" commanded Jules de Grandin.

Silently as a panther stalking through the jungle, he led the way into the corridor and up the stairs. Before the door of David's room he paused, raising his hand in an arresting, minatory gesture.

The voice behind the panels was that of Louella Monteith, yet strangely different from it; deeper, more reverberant than the girl's usual contralto. The words she spoke were in a language strange to me, but reminiscent, somehow, of such few phrases of Hebrew as I had learned when as a young hospital intern I'd ridden an ambulance through the crowded foreign sections of the city. And blending with the cold, passionless monotone of the woman's voice was a second one, a man's voice, quivering with passion, accusatory, low and vindictive as a serpent's hiss.

With a quick movement of his left hand de Grandin thrust the door back and advanced across the threshold. The tableau thus revealed struck me numb with blank amazement.

Although no light burned, the scene was clear-cut as though enacted in brilliant moonlight, for a silvery, radiant luminance without apparent source seemed to permeate the atmosphere of an Egyptian room.

Crouched on a couch, his eyes wide with grisly, unbelieving horror, was David Monteith. Kneeling on the drugget in an attitude half of adoration, half cringing servility, was a man clothed only in a loin-cloth. His shaven head accented his lean, cruel features. One of his long, bony hands was extended, pointing fiercely at young Monteith, and, it seemed to me, the pointed hand was like an aimed weapon, serving to direct the unabating flood of invective the kneeling creature hurled toward the man upon the bed.

But it was the woman that stood in regal, awful majesty in the midst of the moon-like effulgence who caught and riveted my attention. Louella Monteith it was, but a changed, transmuted version of the girl we knew. Upon her head was the crown of Isis—the vulture cap with beaten gold and blue-enamel wings and the vulture's head with gem-set eyes, above it two upright horns between which shone the red gold disk of the full moon, beneath them the uræus, emblem of Osiris.

About her neck lay a broad collar of hammered gold thick-set with emeralds and carnelian, and round her wrists were bands of gold and gleaming, blue enamel in which were studded emeralds and coral. Her bosom was bare, but high beneath her breasts was clasped a belt of blue and gold from which cascaded a diaphanous garment of web-fine linen gathered in scores of tiny, narrow pleats and fringed about the hem with a border of sparkling gems which hung an inch or less above the narrow, arching insteps of her white and tiny feet. In one hand she held a gold and crystal instrument fashioned like a T-cross with an elongated loop at its top, while in the other she bore a three-lashed golden scourge, the emblem of Egyptian royalty.

All this I noted in a sort of wondering daze, but it was the glaring, implacable eyes of her which held me rooted to the spot. Like the eyes of a tigress, or a leopardess, they were, and glowed with a horrid, inward light, as though illumined from behind by the phosphorescent luminance of an all-consuming, heatless flame.

Even as we halted spellbound she raised her golden scourge and aimed it at the man upon the bed, while the crouching thing at her feet gave vent to a wild, demoniac cachinnation—a triumphant laugh of hatred appeased and vengeance satisfied. A low, weak moan came from David Monteith, a groan of abysmal agony, as though his tortured soul were being ravished from his tormented flesh and tore his crippled body into tatters as it was dragged forth.

I started forward with a cry of horror, but Jules de Grandin was before me. "Accursed of God!" he shouted, and his voice was harsh and strident as a battle-cry. "Fallen foes of the Lord Jehovah; upstarts against the power of the Most High; *in nomine Domini, conjuro te, sceleratissime, abire ad tuum locum!* Hence, loathed remnants of a false and futile faith; in the name of Him who overcame ye, I command it!"

For a moment—or an eternity, I know not which—there was dead, frozen silence in that weirdly lighted room. Every actor in the drama stood sculptured-still, like a figure on a graven monument, and only the frantic pulsation of my heart sounded in my ears.

The Frenchman thrust his right hand into the pocket of his lounge-robe and brought forth something—a tiny golden reliquary, a little thing of gold and modest, purple amethyst so small a man might hide it in the hollow of his hand—and letting it slip through his fingers swung it by a slender golden chain, waving it slowly to and fro in the air as though it were a censer. "By the power of the one who cast ye out, O Aset, Aset of olden Egypt, by the memory of Cyrillus of Alexandria, I conjure ye," he chanted slowly. "Behold the thing which I have brought from out the Land of Khem, even that which the holy one of old upraised against ye and against your power; behold, and be afraid!" He swung the little golden cross ceremonially before him and advanced into the room.

The groveling man-shape cut short its horrid laughter, and with jaws still agape, half rose, half crawled across the floor, its lean and claw-like hands upraised as if to ward away some

stream of invincible power which flowed from out the bit of gold de Grandin held.

Jabbering half-formed words in an outlandish tongue, words I could not understand, but which were clearly an appeal, the thing retreated as de Grandin pursued inexorably.

I held my breath in horror, then almost screamed aloud as the Frenchman and his adversary reached the room's boundary, for the hunted creature *passed directly through the wall,* as though brick and mortar had no substance!

The little Frenchman turned from his quarry and approached the form of Isis, which seemed to stand irresolute beside the bed. Only, it was no longer a goddess we beheld, but a woman. True, she was still beautiful and queenly in her trappings of barbaric splendor, but the odd and moonlike light no longer shone around her, nor was there an aura of dread and fearsomeness about her, and the awful, glowing eyes which filled my soul with fear were now recognizable for what they were—the likeness of staring, vengeful eyes *drawn in luminous paint upon her lowered lids!*

"To your chamber, *Mademoiselle,* I command it!" de Grandin ordered in a low, authoritative voice. Then, to me:

"Look to Monsieur David, Friend Trowbridge. You will find him suffering from shock, but not greatly hurt otherwise, I think."

Quickly, I ministered to the fainting man upon the bed, forced water mixed with brandy down his throat, pressed a vial of sal volatile to his nostrils and bathed his wrists and temples. He rallied slightly, gasped once or twice, then lapsed into a heavy, natural sleep. When at last he lay quietly on his pillow I opened his pajama jacket to listen to his heart, and on the flesh of his left breast, faint, but still recognizable for what it was, lay a tiny, reddish stigma, thus:

I hurried to de Grandin to tell him of my find, and met him tiptoeing from Louella Monteith's room. "Softly, my friend," he warned with upraised finger; "she sleeps."

"WHERE's David?" Louella Monteith asked as she joined de Grandin and me at breakfast the following morning. "He's usually an early riser—I hope he's not ill today?" She turned to ascend the stairs to her brother's chamber, but de Grandin put forth a detaining hand.

"Your brother had rather a trying night, *Mademoiselle,*" he said. "Dr. Trowbridge has given him an opiate; it will be some time before he wakes."

"Oh"—the concern in her eyes was very real—"don't tell me the poor boy's had another of his spells! He suffers so! Usually he calls me if he's ill in the night, and I do what I can to help him; but last night I didn't hear a thing. I slept so soundly, too. Do you——"

She brightened as a consoling thought seemed to come to her. "Of course," she smiled. "Why should he have called me when we had two physicians in the house? I'm sure you did everything possible for him, gentlemen."

"Precisely; we did, *Mademoiselle,*" Jules de Grandin returned non-committally as he gave his undivided attention to the well-filled plate of bacon and eggs before him.

"NO! I tell you; I'll never willingly look at that she-devil again, so long as I live!" David Montieth almost shouted in response to de

Grandin's suggestion. "Talk all you will of her being my sister; I tell you she's the vilest, most unholy thing unhanged. Oh God, why doesn't the law recognize witchcraft today? How I'd enjoy denouncing her, and seeing her tied to the stake!" He leaned back on his pillow, exhausted by the vehemence of his emotion, but his deep-set, greenish hazel eyes glowed with fury as he looked from one of us to the other. Then:

"She killed Uncle Absalom, too. I know it. Now I understand what old Maggie Gourlay meant when she warned me against the banshee. It was Louella—my sister! She killed our uncle, and she almost finished me last night. I tell you——"

"And *I* tell *you*, Monsieur David, that you talk like an uncommonly silly fool!" de Grandin broke in sharply. "Hear me, if you please—or if you do not please, for that matter. Attend me, listen, pay attention, forget your chuckle-headedness! You talk of witch-burning, and, *parbleu*, you do well to do so, for you assuredly show the shallow-emptiness of head which so characterized those old ones who sent innocent women to the flames!

"*Non*, listen to me," he bade sharply as the other would have spoken. "You will hear me through, if I must knock you senseless and bind you to the bed in order to keep you quiet!

"Your story of your uncle's death did greatly interest me when first you told it. That old Sepa, the Priest of Aset, or Isis, as we call her nowadays, had any personal part in it I did not seriously consider; but that the constant, continuous, subconscious *thought* of that old one's curse had much to do with it I was very certain. Consider, my friend, you know how half a dozen people, thinking together, can sometimes influence one in a company? You have seen it demonstrated? Good. So it was in this case, only more so; much more so. For generations the dwellers in Egypt bowed the knee to Aset, the All-Mother, she whom they worshiped as She Who Was and Is and Is to Be. Now, whether such a personality as hers ever existed or not is beside the question; let but enough persons loose thoughts of her, and they have created a thought-image of such strength that only *le bon Dieu* knows its limitations.

"So with the vengeance of the dead. For more generations than you have hairs upon your head the Egyptians believed implicitly that he who broke the rest of the entombed dead laid himself open to direst vengeance. And to strengthen this belief, those who were buried were wont to place a curse-stone in their tombs, denouncing the disturbers of their long rest in such language as old Sepa directed against your late uncle. Yes, it is so.

"Your late lamented kinsman spent much time among the ancient tombs. It was inevitable he should have absorbed some sort of half-agnostic belief in the potency of the old ones' curses. That sort of thing grows on one.

"Anon, having retired, he sets himself to translating the various tablets and papyri he had collected. At length he comes upon the curse-stone from old Sepa's grave.

"Now, we do not realize when the *Uncinaria americana* infects our systems with its eggs, but anon we suffer drowsiness, anemia and dropsy. We have no desire to do anything but sit about and sleep—we have the disease known as hookworm, for the eggs have germinated. So it was with old Sepa's curse. *Monsieur* your uncle wrought out the translation of the curse-stone, and paid little heed to what he read—at first. But all the same the idea of a dreadful doom awaiting him who invaded that wicked old one's tomb was firmly lodged in his subconscious mind, and there it germinated, and grew into a monstrous thing, even as the hookworm's

(Continued on page 570)

A Brief Tale of Black Magic

The Portrait

By AUGUST W. DERLETH

MESSER the Duke Cosimo di Colonna stopped suddenly. It was not often that he walked so close to the lackeys' quarters of his city residence. He stopped now because he heard the voice of his head lackey raised in argument with another voice, not familiar to him. He listened attentively. The discussion, it appeared, was about a portrait which the stranger, evidently the artist himself, wished to sell. He could hear the artist's voice.

"You ask me why he did not take it? How should I know? Blood of Satan! He asked me to paint him his portrait; he sat for me; and after I slave my hands to the bone he says he does not like it and will not have it. Nor will I do another for him; it is a good likeness, and because he has a hooked nose, and I paint him as he is, is that a reason why he should not take it? Diavolo! And after all I am not trying to sell the portrait to you, but to your master."

"My master can not be called for the pleasure of every vagabond who passes," the lackey was answering.

Messer the Duke di Colonna laughed to himself and stepped out from behind the arras. He glided swiftly down the short stair behind the lackey, tapped him lightly on the shoulder, and dismissed him. He turned to the artist, who stood holding a veiled portrait in his hands; he was making his best attempt to bow, but the portrait in his hands did not allow him to bend far forward.

"Messer Duca," began the artist, "I have come to sell what I have wrought, if it may please you."

The duke smiled imperturbably. With a gesture the artist unveiled the portrait. The duke started forward when his eyes met the face of the portrait; with an effort he moved back. For a moment he regarded the picture; then a slow smile etched itself about the lips of his sensuous mouth and a sudden brightness stole into his brooding dark eyes. He remained oblivious to what the artist was saying in explanation; besides, he had heard it before. He saw nothing but the face of Gianbattista di Vitelli, his lifelong enemy.

"I will give you a thousand ducats for the portrait."

The artist dropped the veil, and stooped mechanically to recover it. He looked at the duke in astonishment.

"Speak! Is it satisfactory?"

"Ample, Magnificence, ample."

THE Duke di Colonna took the portrait and placed it among others in his gallery. He sat before it some time, thinking. At length he rose and walked to his spacious study, where he opened a drawer in a cabinet on one side of the room, and took out a scroll. He dipped his quill into a container of ink upon a shelf near the cabinet and stared thoughtfully down at the blank sheet of paper. Finally he wrote a few words, and with a flourish, signed his name. He rolled the paper up and returned to the study table, where he struck a

gong that brought a lackey to him in a moment.

"You will go to the house of Messer Lazaro and give him this," said the duke, and handed the scroll to the lackey, who bowed and retired. The duke moved toward the windows, where he stood looking out on the darkening city.

The duke had twice turned the hour glass and night had fallen before the lackey returned with Messer Lazaro. The duke and Messer Lazaro, the magician, now sat alone.

"Your request comes at a fortunate hour, my lord."

"It is well."

"What is your pleasure?"

"I have a problem before me, Messer Lazaro, and I believe that you can aid me. I have supreme confidence in your magic powers, Messer, and if you are willing, I am going to tax them tonight. I have often heard it said that one can rid himself of another by magic. This I know to be true, but as to what means I must yet learn. Is it true that if one has a likeness of his enemy, through a magician's incantations over it, his enemy dies?"

"It is true, my lord."

"Let us suppose that I have a likeness of my enemy in this house; I should like you to rid me of him. What say you to that?"

"There are difficulties," answered the magician, shrugging his shoulders.

"A thousand ducats, Messer Lazaro!"

"I will do it. But think not there is no danger. I myself am safe, but there are many things."

"What do you mean, Messer Lazaro?"

"If your enemy so much as suspects your hand in this, his death, he, too, may summon black magic to his aid—too late, perhaps, to save himself, but not too late to curse you, my lord."

"I fear him not."

"Well said, Magnificence. But there are ways. There are instances of such power in which the dying one transferred his soul—the mind knows not the ways of Satan."

"The dead can do no harm." The duke rose and passed from the room, beckoning the magician to follow him. They began the ascent of the broad stairway leading to the gallery. Behind the duke, the magician was still talking.

"In Pisa once, my lord, a man had done another to death by running through a waxen image with needles. Then suddenly, after all was done, the needles arose and plunged themselves into the body of the murderer. The soul, they said, was transferred."

"No needles will be needed here, Messer Lazaro. You see, it is a portrait."

The Duke di Colonna removed the covering from the portrait and stepped back to allow the magician to see the better. Messer Lazaro held his breath for a moment.

"That is the man who must die, Messer. I shall leave you alone. When all is finished come to my study below and I will pay you amply."

In the space of a glass of sand the magician descended for his pay. The duke flung a purse full of ducats on the table.

"It is done, Messer Lazaro?" he asked.

"Done," he nodded, "but destroy the portrait by fire, my lord." Messer Lazaro inclined his head and stepped from the room.

IT WAS late that night when the duke went slowly up to the gallery to cover the portrait of his late enemy. It was just as he was about to place the covering over the face when he noticed something amiss. He dropped the cover and moved some distance away. There was something different about the face—or was it an image of his eyes? He scrutinized it carefully. However, it needed no careful scrutiny to convince him of the facts that

he endeavored to crowd from his mind. The smile was gone, and the eyes were no longer frank in their expression, but were suffused with hatred. He moved over to one side and stared at it. There was no illusion about the face, but it was possible that his first glimpse of it at the door had been an error. He contented himself with this thought, and was just about to throw the cover over the portrait when he spied something that caused him to step hastily backward. The eyes of the portrait had moved! Terror-stricken, he cast the covering awkwardly upon the portrait and went hastily downstairs.

The following morning he received secret confirmation of the magician's statement of the death of the Duke di Vitelli. He thought at once of the portrait, but dismissed it with a shudder. For a week he did not approach it, but not for once could he forget it.

Then one night, after he had convinced himself that the portrait had not changed at all—that it was all his imagination, he crept slowly up the great stairs, slunk silently through the hall and into the gallery, and moved warily over to the portrait. He casually removed the cover, but the furious pounding of his heart belied his casual demeanor. There was not a semblance of a smile upon the face of the portrait. And that same expression of malefic hatred lingered in the eyes. It was not until this was impressed upon him that the duke noticed that the position of the portrait had been changed. And he alone held the key to his art gallery! Then, while he stared at the portrait, the eyes moved slowly, surely, and the lips curved ever so slightly.

The horror of the thing told, and something snapped in the mind of the Duke di Colonna. He was seized with a mad desire to kill; to kill this thing that was beyond his comprehension. He drew his stiletto from the bosom of his doublet and came slowly closer to the portrait, brandishing the weapon. The eyes of the portrait moved imperturbably about, and the action goaded him on to fury. He slashed it in a paroxysm of wild anger.

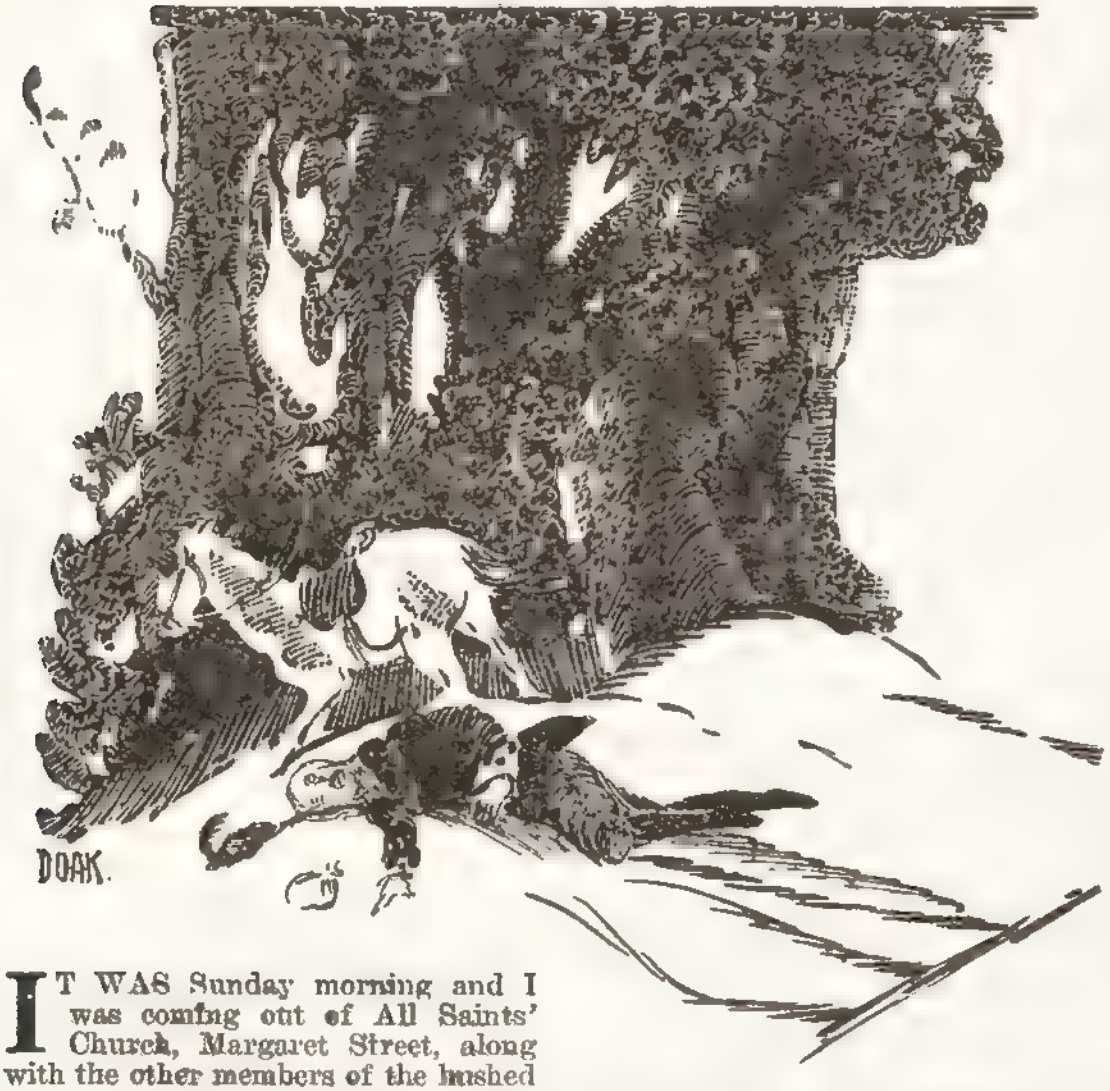
A terrible scream fell upon the ears of the lackeys in their quarters; a scream that rose gradually higher and higher, then ended as suddenly as it had begun. They trembled, but made no move, for they had often heard screams in this house. It was not until they discovered blood dripping upon the great table in the study late on the following night that they sought to discover its source. They went warily up to the gallery.

On the floor lay the body of their master with a stiletto firmly imbedded in his breast, and beside him lay the overturned portrait. But where did the blood come from? One of the lackeys bent to raise the slashed portrait. At that moment a draft blew out the torch they had with them. When they had succeeded in lighting it again, they saw a great pool of sluggish blood on the floor where the portrait had lain.

And while they watched, a thin stream of blood oozed out of the great gash in the portrait, sought its way to the rim, and splattered silently into the dark pool on the floor. The face of the bleeding thing was smiling.

The Shut

by Henry S. Whitehead



IT WAS Sunday morning and I was coming out of All Saints' Church, Margaret Street, along with the other members of the hushed and reverent congregation, when, near the entrance doors, a hand fell lightly on my shoulder. Turning, I perceived that it was the Earl of Carruth. I nodded, without speaking, for there is that in the atmosphere of this great church, especially after one of its magnificent services and heart-searching sermons, which preludes anything like the hum of conversation

Room

"The dead body of Sir William Greaves lay beside the highroad, an ounce ball through his heart."

which one meets with in many places of worship.

In these worldly and "scientific" days it is unusual to meet with a person of Lord Carruth's intellectual and scientific attainments who troubles very much about religion. As for me, Gerald Canevin, I have always been a church-going fellow.

Carruth accompanied me in silence through the entrance doors and out into Margaret Street. Then, linking his arm in mine, he guided me, still in silence, to where his Rolls-Royce car stood at the curbstone.

"Have you any luncheon engagement, Mr. Canevin?" he inquired, when we were just beside the car, the footman holding the door open.

"None whatever," I replied.

"Then do me the pleasure of lunching with me," invited Carruth.

"I was planning on driving from church to your rooms," he explained, as soon as we were seated and the car whirling us noiselessly toward his town house in Mayfair. "A rather extraordinary matter has come up, and Sir John Scott has asked me to look into it. Should you care to hear about it?"

"Delighted," I acquiesced, and settled myself to listen.

To my surprize, Lord Carruth began reciting a portion of the Nicene Creed, to which, sung very beautifully by All Saints' choir, we had recently been listening.

"Maker of Heaven and earth," quoted Carruth, musingly, "and of all things—visible and *invisible.*" I started forward in my seat. He had given a peculiar emphasis to the last word, "invisible."

"A fact," I ejaculated, "constantly forgotten by the critics of religion! The Church has always recognized the existence of the invisible creation."

"Right, Mr. Canevin. And—this invisible creation; it doesn't mean merely angels!"

"No one who has lived in the West Indies can doubt that," I replied.

"Nor in India," countered Carruth. "That fact—that the Creed attributes to God the authorship of an invisible creation—is an interesting commentary on the much-quoted remark of Hamlet to Horatio: 'There are more things in Heaven and earth, Horatio, than are dreamed of in your philosophy.' Apparently, Horatio's philosophy, like that of the present day, took little account of the spiritual side of affairs; left out God *and what He had made.* Perhaps Horatio had recited the creed a thousand times, and never realized what that clause implies!"

"I have thought of it often, myself," said I. "And now—I am all curiosity—what, please, is the application?"

"It is an occurrence in one of the old coaching inns," began Carruth, "on the Brighton Road; a very curious matter. It appears that the proprietor—a gentleman, by the way, Mr. William Snow, who purchased the inn for an investment just after the Armistice—has been having a rather unpleasant time of it. It has to do with shoes!"

"Shoes?" I inquired; "shoes!" It seemed an abrupt transition from the Nicene Creed to shoes!

"Yes," replied Carruth, "and not only shoes but all sorts of leather affairs. In fact, the last and chief difficulty was about the disappearance of a commercial traveler's leather sample-case. But I perceive we are arriving home. We can continue the account at luncheon."

During lunch he gave me a rather full account, with details, of what had happened at "The Coach and Horses" Inn on the Brighton Road, an account which I will briefly summarize as follows:

Snow, the proprietor, had bought the old inn partly for business reasons, partly for sentimental. It had been a portion, up to about a century before, of his family's landed property. He had repaired and enlarged it, modernized it in some ways, and in general restored a much run-down institution, making "The Coach and Horses" into a paying investment. He had retained, so far as possible, the antique architectural features of the old coaching inn, and before very long had built up a motor clientele of large proportions by sound and careful management.

Everything, in fact, had prospered with the gentleman-innkeeper's affairs until there began, some four months back, a series of unaccountable disappearances. The objects which had, as it were, vanished into thin air, were all—and this seemed to me the most curious and bizarre feature of Carruth's recital—leather articles. Pair after pair of shoes or boots, left outside bedroom doors at night, would be gone the next morning. Naturally

the "boots" was suspected of theft. But the "boots" had been able to prove his innocence easily enough. He was, it seemed, a rather intelligent broken-down jockey, of a keen wit. He had assured Mr. Snow of his surprize as well as of his innocence, and suggested that he take a week's holiday to visit his aged mother in Kent and that a substitute "boots," chosen by the proprietor, should take his place. Snow had acquiesced, and the disappearance of guests' footwear had continued, to the consternation of the substitute, a total stranger, obtained from a London agency.

That exonerated Billings, the jockey, who came back to his duties at the end of his holiday with his character as an honest servant intact. Moreover, the disappearances had not been confined to boots and shoes. Pocketbooks, leather luggage, bags, cigarette cases — all sorts of leather articles went the way of the earlier boots and shoes, and besides the expense and annoyance of replacing these, Mr. Snow began to be seriously concerned about the reputation of his house. An inn in which one's leather belongings were known to be unsafe would not be a very strong financial asset. The matter had come to a head through the disappearance of the commercial traveler's sample-case, as noted by Carruth in his first brief account of this mystery. The main difficulty in this affair was that the traveler had been a salesman of jewelry, and Snow had been confronted with a bill for several hundred pounds, which he had felt constrained to pay. After that he had laid the mysterious matter before Sir John Scott, head of Scotland Yard, and Scott had called in Carruth because he recognized in Snow's story certain elements which caused him to believe this was no case for mere criminal investigation.

After lunch Carruth ordered the car again, and, after stopping at my rooms for some additional clothing and the other necessities for an overnight visit, we started along the Brighton Road for the scene of the difficulty.

We arrived about four that Sunday afternoon, and immediately went into conference with the proprietor.

Mr. William Snow was a youngish, middle-aged gentleman, very well dressed, and obviously a person of intelligence and natural attainments. He gave us all the information possible, repeating, with many details, the matters which I have already summarized, while we listened in silence. When he had finished:

"I should like to ask some questions," said Carruth.

"I am prepared to answer anything you wish to enquire about," Mr. Snow assured us.

"Well, then, about the sentimental element in your purchase of the inn, Mr. Snow—tell us, if you please, what you may know of the more ancient history of this old hostelry. I have no doubt there is history connected with it, situated where it is. Undoubtedly, in the coaching days of the Four Georges, it must have been the scene of many notable gatherings."

"You are right, Lord Carruth. As you know, it was a portion of the property of my family. All the old registers are intact, and are at your disposal. It is an inn of very ancient foundation. It was, indeed, old in those days of the Four Georges, to whom you refer. The records go back well into the Sixteenth Century, in fact; and there was an inn here even before registers were kept. They are of comparatively modern origin, you know. Your ancient landlord kept, I imagine, only his 'reckoning'; he was not concerned with records; even licenses are comparatively modern, you know."

The registers were produced, a set of bulky, dry-smelling, calf-bound volumes. There were eight of them.

Carruth and I looked at each other with a mutual shrug.

"I suggest," said I, after a slight pause, "that perhaps you, Mr. Snow, may already be familiar with the contents of these. I should imagine it might require a week or two of pretty steady application even to go through them cursorily."

Mr. William Snow smiled. "I was about to offer to mention the high points," said he. "I have made a careful study of these old volumes, and I can undoubtedly save you both a great deal of reading. The difficulty is—what shall I tell you? If only I knew what to put my finger upon—but I do not, you see!"

"Perhaps we can manage that," threw in Carruth, "but first, may we not have Billings in and question him?"

The former jockey, now the boots at "The Coach and Horses," was summoned and proved to be a wizened, copper-faced individual, with a keen eye and a deferential manner. Carruth invited him to a seat and he sat, gingerly, on the very edge of a chair while we talked with him. I will make no attempt to reproduce his accent, which is quite beyond me. His account was somewhat as follows, omitting the questions asked him both by Carruth and myself.

"At first it was only boots and shoes. Then other things began to go. The things always disappeared at night. Nothing ever disappeared before midnight, because I've sat up and watched many's the time. Yes, we tried everything: watching, even tying up leather things, traps! Yes, sir—steel traps, baited with a boot! Twice we did that. Both times the boot was gone in the morning, the trap not even sprung. No, sir—no one possibly among the servants. Yet, an 'inside' job; it couldn't have been otherwise. From all over the house, yes. My own old riding-boots—two pairs—gone completely; not a trace; right out of my room. That was when I was down in Kent as Mr. Snow's told you, gentlemen. The man who took my place slept in my room, left the door open one night—boots gone in the morning, right under his nose

"Seen anything? Well, sir, in a manner, yes—in a manner no! To be precise, no. I can't say that I ever saw anything, that is, anybody; no, nor any apparatus as you might say, in a manner of speaking—no hooks, no strings, nothing used to take hold of the things—but——" Here Billings hesitated, glanced at his employer, looked down at his feet, and his coppery face turned a shade redder.

"Gentlemen," said he, as though coming to a resolution, "I can only tell you the God's truth about it. You may think me barmy—shouldn't blame you if you did! But—I'm as much interested in this-'ere thing as Mr. Snow 'imself, barrin' that I 'aven't had to pay the score—make up the value of the things, I mean, as 'e 'as. I'll tell you—so 'elp me Gawd, gentlemen, it's a fact—I *'ave* seen something, absurd as it'll seem to you. I've seen——"

Billings hesitated once more, dropped his eyes, looked distressed, glanced at all of us in the most shamefaced, deprecating manner imaginable, twiddled his hands together, looked, in short, as though he were about to own up to it that he was, after all, responsible for the mysterious disappearances; then finally said:

"I've seen things disappear—through the air! Now—it's hout! But it's a fact, gentlemen all—so 'elp me, it's the truth. Through the air, just as if someone were carrying them away—someone inwisible I mean, in a manner of speaking—bloomin' pair of boots, swingin' along through the bloomin' air—enough to make a man say 'is prayers, for a fact!"

It took considerable assuring on the part both of Carruth and myself to convince the man Billings that neither of us regarded him as demented, or,

as he pithily expressed it, "barmy." We assured him, while our host sat looking at his servant with a slightly puzzled frown, that, on the contrary, we believed him implicitly, and furthermore that we regarded his statement as distinctly helpful. Mr. Snow, obviously convinced that something in his diminutive servitor's mental works was unhinged, almost demurred to our request that we go, forthwith, and examine the place in the hotel where Billings alleged his marvel to have occurred.

WE WERE conducted up two flights of winding steps to the story which had, in the inn's older days, plainly been an attic. There, Billings indicated, was the scene of the disappearance of the "bloomin' boot, swingin' along — unaccompanied — through the bloomin' air."

It was a sunny corridor, lighted by the spring sunlight through several quaint, old-fashioned, mullioned windows. Billings showed us where he had sat, on a stool in the corridor, watching; indicated the location of the boots, outside a doorway of one of the less expensive guest-rooms; traced for us the route taken by the disappearing boots.

This route led us around a corner of the corridor, a corner which, the honest "boots" assured us, he had been "too frightened" to negotiate on the dark night of the alleged marvel.

But we went around it, and there, in a small, right-angled hallway, it became at once apparent to us that the boots on that occasion must have gone through one of two doorways, opposite each other at either side, or else vanished into thin air.

Mr. Snow, in answer to our remarks on this subject, threw open the door at the right. It led into a small, but sunny and very comfortable-looking bedchamber, shining with honest cleanliness and decorated tastefully with chintz curtains with valances, and containing several articles of pleasant, antique furniture. This room, as the repository of air-traveling boots, seemed unpromising. We looked in in silence.

"And what is on the other side of this short corridor?" I enquired.

"The 'shut room'," replied Mr. William Snow.

Carruth and I looked at each other.

"Explain, please," said Carruth.

"It is merely a room which has been kept shut, except for an occasional cleaning," replied our host, readily, "for more than a century. There was, as a matter of fact, a murder committed in it, in the year 1818, and it was, thereafter, disused. When I purchased the inn, I kept it shut, partly, I daresay, for sentimental reasons; partly, perhaps, because it seemed to me a kind of asset for an ancient hostelry. It has been known as 'the shut room' for more than a hundred years. There was, otherwise, no reason why I should not have put the room in use. I am not in the least superstitious."

"When was the room last opened?" I enquired.

"It was cleaned about ten days ago, I believe," answered Mr. Snow.

"May we examine it?" asked Carruth.

"Certainly," agreed Snow, and forthwith sent Billings after the key.

"And may we hear the story—if you know the details—of the murder to which you referred?" Carruth asked.

"Certainly," said Snow, again. "But it is a long and rather complicated story. Perhaps it would do better during dinner."

In this decision we acquiesced, and, Billings returning with the key, Snow unlocked the door and we looked into "the shut room." It was quite empty, and the blinds were drawn down over the two windows. Carruth raised these, letting in a flood of sunlight. The room was utterly characterless to all appearance, but—I confess to a certain "sensitivity" in such matters

—I "felt" something like a faint, ominous chill. It was not, as the word I have used suggests, anything like physical cold. It was, so to express it, mentally cold. I despair of expressing what I mean more clearly. We looked over the entire room, an easy task as there was absolutely nothing to attract the eye. Both windows were in the wall at our right hand as we entered, and, save for the entrance door through which we had just come, the other three walls were quite blank.

Carruth stepped half-way out through the doorway and looked at the width of the wall in which the door was set. It was, perhaps, ten inches thick. He came back into the room, measured with his glance the distance from window-wall to the blank wall opposite the windows, again stepped outside, into the passageway this time, and along it until he came to the place where the short passage turned into the longer corridor from which we had entered it. He turned to his right this time, I following him curiously, that is, in the direction opposite that from which we had walked along the corridor, and tapped lightly on the wall there.

"About the same thickness, what?" he enquired of Snow.

"I believe so," came the answer. "We can easily measure it, if you wish."

"No, it will not be necessary, I think. We know that it is approximately the same." Carruth ceased speaking and we followed him back into the room once more. He walked straight across it, rapped on the wall opposite the doorway.

"And how thick is this wall?" he enquired.

"It is impossible to say," replied Snow, looking slightly mystified. "You see, there are no rooms on that side, only the outer wall, and no window through which we could easily estimate the thickness. I suppose it is the same as the others, about ten inches I'd imagine."

Carruth nodded, and led the way out into the hallway once more. Snow looked enquiringly at Carruth, then at me.

"It may as well be locked again," offered Carruth, "but—I'd be grateful if you'd allow me to keep the key until tomorrow."

Snow handed him the key without comment, but a slight look of puzzlement was on his face as he did so. Carruth offered no comment, and I thought it wise to defer the question which was on my lips until later when we were alone. We started down the long corridor toward the staircase, Billings touching his forehead and stepping on ahead of us and disappearing rapidly down the stairs, doubtless to his interrupted duties in the scullery.

"It is time to think of which rooms you would prefer," suggested our pleasant-voiced host as we neared the stairs. "Suppose I show you some which are not occupied, and you may, of course, choose what suit you best."

"On this floor, if you please," said Carruth, positively.

"As you wish, of course," agreed Snow, "but, the better rooms are on the floor below. Would you not, perhaps, prefer——"

"Thank you, no," answered Carruth. "We shall prefer to be up here if we may, and—if convenient—a large room with two beds."

"That can be managed very easily," agreed Snow. He stepped back a few paces along the corridor, and opened a door. A handsome, large room, very comfortably and well furnished, came to our view. Its excellence spoke well for the management of "The Coach and Horses." The "better" rooms must indeed be palatial if this were a fair sample of those somewhat less desirable.

"This will answer admirably," said Carruth, directing an eyebrow at me. I nodded hastily. I was eager to

acquiesce in anything he might have in mind.

"Then we shall call it settled," remarked Snow. "I shall have your things brought up at once. Perhaps you would like to remain here now?"

"Thank you," said Carruth. "What time do we dine?"

"At seven, if you please, or later if you prefer. I am having a private room for the three of us."

"That will answer splendidly," agreed Carruth, and I added a word of agreement. Mr. Snow hurried off to attend to the sending up of our small luggage, and Carruth drew me at once into the room.

"I am a little more than anxious," he began, "to hear that tale of the murder. It is an extraordinary step forward—do you not agree with me?—that Billings' account of the disappearing boots—'through the air'—should fit so neatly and unexpectedly into their going around that corner of the corridor where 'the shut room' is. It sets us forward, I imagine. What is your impression, Mr. Canevin?"

"I agree with you heartily," said I. "The only point on which I am not clear is the matter of the thickness of the walls. Is there anything in that?"

"If you will allow me, I'll defer that explanation until we have had the account of the murder at dinner," said Carruth, and, our things arriving at that moment, we set about preparing for dinner.

DINNER, in a small and beautifully furnished private room, did more, if anything more were needed, to convince me that Mr. William Snow's reputation as a successful modern innkeeper had been well earned. It was a thoroughly delightful meal in all respects, but that, in a general way, is really all that I remember about it because my attention was wholly occupied in taking in every detail of the strange story which our host unfolded to us beginning with the fish course—I think it was a fried sole—and which ended only when we were sipping the best coffee I had tasted since my arrival in England from our United States.

"In the year 1818," said Mr. Snow, "near the end of the long reign of King George III—the king, you will remember, Mr. Canevin, who gave you Americans your Fourth of July—this house was kept by one James Titmarsh. Titmarsh was a very old man. It was his boast that he had taken over the landlordship in the very year that His Most Gracious Majesty, George III, had come to the throne, and that he would last as long as the king reigned! That was in the year 1760, and George III had been reigning for fifty-eight years. Old Titmarsh, you see, must have been somewhere in the neighborhood of eighty, himself.

"Titmarsh was something of a 'character.' For some years the actual management of the inn had devolved upon his nephew, Oliver Titmarsh, who was middle-aged, and none too respectable, though, apparently, an able taverner. Old Titmarsh, if tradition is to be believed, had many a row with his deputy, but, being himself childless, he was more or less dependent upon Oliver, who consorted with low company for choice, and did not bear the best of reputations in the community. Old Titmarsh's chief bugbear, in connection with Oliver, was the latter's friendship with Simon Forrester. Forrester lacked only a bard to be immortal. But—there was no Cowper to his John Gilpin, so to speak. No writer of the period, nor, indeed, since, has chosen to set forth Forrester's exploits. Nevertheless, these were highly notable. Forrester was the very king-pin of the highwaymen, operating with extraordinary success and daring along the much-traveled Brighton Road.

"Probably Old Titmarsh was philosopher enough to ignore his nephew's associations and acts so long as he

attended to the business of the inn. The difficulty, in connection with Forrester, was that Forrester, an extraordinarily bold fellow, whose long immunity from the gallows had caused him to believe himself possessed of a kind of charmed life, constantly resorted to 'The Coach and Horses', which, partly because of its convenient location, and partly because of its good cheer, he made his house-of-call.

"During the evening of the first of June, in the year 1818, a Royal Courier paused at 'The Coach and Horses' for some refreshment and a fresh mount. This gentleman carried one of the old king's peremptory messages to the Prince of Wales, then sojourning at Brighton, and who, under his sobriquet of 'First Gentleman of Europe,' was addicted to a life which sadly irked his royal parent at Whitehall. It was an open secret that only Prince George's importance to the realm as heir apparent to the throne prevented some very drastic action being taken against him for his innumerable follies and extravagances, on the part of king and parliament. This, you will recall, was two years before the old king died and 'The First Gentleman' came to the throne as George IV.

"The Royal Messenger, Sir William Greaves, arriving about nine in the evening after a hard ride, went into the coffee-room, to save the time which the engagement and preparation of a private room would involve, and when he paid his score, he showed a purse full of broad gold pieces. He did not know that Simon Forrester, sitting behind him over a great mug of mulled port, took careful note of this unconscious display of wealth in ready money. Sir William delayed no longer than necessary to eat a chop and drink a pot of 'Six Ale'. Then, his spurs clanking, he took his departure.

"He was barely out of the room before Forrester, his wits, perhaps, affected by the potations which he had been imbibing, called for his own mount, Black Bess, and rose, slightly stumbling, to his feet, to speed the pot-boy on his way to the stables.

"Ye'll not be harrying a Royal Messenger, a-gad's-sake, Simon," protested his companion, who was no less a person than Oliver Titmarsh, seizing his crony by his ruffled sleeve of laced satin.

"'Unhand me!' thundered Forrester; then, boastfully, 'There's no power in England'll stay Sim Forrester when he chooses to take the road!'

"Somewhat unsteadily he strode to the door, and roared his commands to the stable-boy who was not leading Black Bess rapidly enough to suit his drunken humor. Once in the saddle, the fumes of the wine he had drunk seemed to evaporate. Without a word Simon Forrester set out, sitting his good mare like a statue, in the wake of Sir William Greaves toward Brighton.

"The coffee-room—as Oliver Titmarsh turned back into it from the doorway whither he had accompanied Forrester—seethed into an uproar. Freed from the dominating presence of the truculent ruffian who would as soon slit a man's throat as look him in the eye along the sights of his horse-pistol from behind the black mask, the numerous guests, silent before, had found their tongues. Oliver Titmarsh sought to drown out their clamor of protest, but before he could succeed, Old Titmarsh, attracted by the unwonted noise, had hobbled down the short flight of steps from his private cubbyhole and entered the room.

"It required only a moment, despite Oliver's now frantic efforts to stem the tide of comment, before the old man had grasped the purport of what was toward. Oliver secured comparative silence, then urged his aged uncle to retire. The old man did so, muttering helplessly, internally cursing his age and feebleness which

made it out of the question for him to regulate this scandal which had originated in his inn. A King's Messenger, then as now, was sacred in the eyes of all decent citizens. A King's Messenger—to be called on to 'stand and deliver' by the villainous Forrester! It was too much. Muttering and grumbling, the old man left the room, but, instead of going back to his easy-chair and his pipe and glass, he stepped out through the kitchens, and, without so much as a lantern to light his path, groped his way to the stables.

"A few minutes later the sound of horse's hoofs in the cobbled stable-yard brought a pause in the clamor which had once more broken out and now raged in the coffee-room. Listening, those in the coffee-room heard the animal trot out through the gate, and the diminishing sound of its galloping as it took the road toward Brighton. Oliver Titmarsh rushed to the door, but the horse and its rider were already out of sight. Then he ran up to his ancient uncle's room, only to find the crafty old man apparently dozing in his chair. He hastened to the stables. One of the grooms was gone, and the best saddle-horse. From the others, duly warned by Old Titmarsh, he could elicit nothing. He returned to the coffee-room in a towering rage and forthwith cleared it, driving his guests out before him in a protesting herd.

"Then he sat down, alone, a fresh bottle before him, to await developments.

"It was more than an hour later when he heard the distant beat of a galloping horse's hoofs through the quiet June night, and a few minutes later Simon Forrester rode into the stable-yard and cried out for an hostler for his Bess.

"He strode into the coffee-room a minute later, a smirk of satisfaction on his ugly, scarred face. Seeing his crony, Oliver, alone, he drew up a chair opposite him, removed his coat, hung it over the back of his chair, and placed over its back where the coat hung, the elaborate leather harness consisting of crossed straps and holsters which he always wore. From the holsters protruded the grips of 'Jem and Jack', as Forrester had humorously named his twin horse-pistols, huge weapons, splendidly kept, each of which threw an ounce ball. Then, drawing back the chair, he sprawled in it at his ease, fixing on Oliver Titmarsh an evil grin, and bellowing loudly for wine.

" 'For,' he protested, 'my throat is full of the dust of the road, Oliver, and, lad, there's enough to settle the score, never doubt me!' and out upon the table he cast the bulging purse which Sir William Greaves had momentarily displayed when he paid his score an hour and a half back.

"Oliver Titmarsh, horrified at this evidence that his crony had actually dared to molest a King's Messenger, glanced hastily and fearfully about him, but the room, empty and silent save for their own presence, held no prying inimical informer. He began to urge upon Forrester the desirability of retiring. It was approaching eleven o'clock, and while the coffee-room was, fortunately, empty, no one knew who might enter from the road or come down from one of the guest-rooms at any moment. He shoved the bulging purse, heavy with its broad gold-pieces, across the table to his crony, beseeching him to pocket it, but Forrester, drunk with the pride of his exploit, which was unique among the depredations of the road's gentry, boasted loudly and tossed off glass after glass of the heavy port wine a trembling pot-boy had fetched him.

"Then Oliver's entreaties were supplemented from an unexpected source. Old Titmarsh, entering through a door in the rear wall of the coffee-

room, came silently and leaned over the back of the ruffian's chair, and added a persuasive voice to his nephew's entreaties.

"'Best go up to bed, now, Simon, my lad,' croaked the old man, wheedlingly, patting the bulky shoulders of the hulking ruffian with his palsied old hands.

"Forrester, surprized, turned his head and goggled at the graybeard. Then, with a great laugh, and tossing off a final bumper, he rose unsteadily to his feet, and thrust his arms into the sleeves of the fine coat which old Titmarsh, having detached from the back of the chair, held out to him.

"'I'll go, I'll go, old Gaffer,' he kept repeating as he struggled into his coat, with mock jocularity, 'seeing you're so careful of me! Gad's hooks! I might as well! There be no more purses to rook this night, it seems!'

"And with this, pocketing the purse and taking over his arm the pistol-harness which the old man thrust at him, the villain lumbered up the stairs to his accustomed room.

"'Do thou go after him, Oliver,' urged the old man. 'I'll bide here and lock the doors. There'll likely be no further custom this night.'

"Oliver Titmarsh, sobered, perhaps, by his fears, followed Forrester up the stairs, and the old man, crouched in one of the chairs, waited and listened, his ancient ears cocked against a certain sound he was expecting to hear.

"IT CAME within a quarter of an hour—the distant beat of the hoofs of horses, many horses. It was, indeed, as though a considerable company approached 'The Coach and Horses' along the Brighton Road. Old Titmarsh smiled to himself and crept toward the inn doorway. He laboriously opened the great oaken door and peered into the night. The sound of many hoofbeats was now clearer, plainer.

"Then, abruptly, the hoofbeats died on the calm June air. Old Titmarsh, somewhat puzzled, listened, tremblingly. Then he smiled in his beard one more. Strategy, this! Someone wit a head on his shoulders was in command of that troop! They had stopped at some distance, lest the hoofbeats should alarm their quarry.

"A few minutes later the old man heard the muffled sound of careful footfalls, and, within another minute, a King's Officer in his red coat had crept up beside him.

"'He's within,' whispered Old Titmarsh, 'and well gone by now in his damned drunkard's slumber. Summon the troopers, sir. I'll lead ye to where the villain sleeps. He hath the purse of His Majesty's messenger upon him. What need ye of better evidence?'

"'Nay,' replied the train-band captain in a similar whisper, 'that evidence, even, is not required. We have but now taken up the dead body of Sir William Greaves beside the highroad, an ounce ball through his honest heart. 'Tis a case, this, of drawing and quartering, Titmarsh; thanks to your good offices in sending your boy for me.'

"The troopers gradually assembled. When eight had arrived, the captain, preceded by Old Titmarsh and followed in turn by his trusty eight, mounted the steps to where Forrester slept. It was, as you have guessed, the empty room you examined this afternoon, 'the shut room' of this house.

"At the foot of the upper stairs the captain addressed his men in a whisper: 'A desperate man, this, lads. 'Ware bullets! Yet—he must needs be taken alive, for the assizes, and much credit to them that take him. He hath been a pest of the road as well ye know these many years agone. Upon him, then, ere he rises from his drunken sleep! He hath

partaken heavily. Pounce upon him ere he rises.'

"A mutter of acquiescence came from the troopers. They tightened their belts, and stepped alertly, silently, after their leader, preceded by their ancient guide carrying a pair of candles.

"Arrived at the door of the room the captain disposed his men and crying out 'in the King's name!' four of these stout fellows threw themselves against the door. It gave at once under that massed impact, and the men rushed into the room, dimly lighted by Old Titmarsh's candles.

"Forrester, his eyes blinking evilly in the candle-light, was half-way out of bed when they got into the room. He slept, he was accustomed to boast, 'with one eye open, drunk or sober!' Throwing off the coverlid, the highwayman leaped for the chair over the back of which hung his fine laced coat, the holsters uppermost. He plunged his hands into the holsters, and stood, for an instant, the very picture of baffled amazement.

"The holsters were empty!

"Then, as four stalwart troopers flung themselves upon him to bear him to the floor, there was heard Old Titmarsh's harsh, senile cackle:

"'Twas I that robbed ye, ye villain — took your pretty boys, your "Jem" and your "Jack" out the holsters whiles ye were strugglin' into your fine coat! Ye'll not abide in a decent house beyond this night, I'm thinking: and 'twas the old man who did for ye, murdering wretch that ye are!'

"A terrific struggle ensued. With or without his 'Pretty Boys' Simon Forrester was a thoroughly tough customer, versed in every sleight of hand-to-hand fighting. He bit and kicked; he elbowed and gouged. He succeeded in hurling one of the troopers bodily against the blank wall, and the man sank there and lay still, a motionless heap. After a terrific struggle with the other three who had cast themselves upon him, the remaining troopers and their captain standing aside because there was not room to get at him in the mêlée, he succeeded in getting the forefinger of one of the troopers, who had reached for a face-hold upon him, between his teeth, and bit through it at the joint.

"Frantic with rage and pain this trooper, disengaging himself, and before he could be stopped, seized a heavy oaken bench and, swinging it through the air, brought it down on Simon Forrester's skull. No human bones, even Forrester's, could sustain that murderous assault. The tough wood crunched through his skull, and thereafter he lay quiet. Simon Forrester would never be drawn and quartered, nor even hanged. Simon Forrester, ignobly, as he had lived, was dead; and it remained for the troopers only to carry out the body and for their captain to indite his report.

"Thereafter, the room was stripped and closed by Old Titmarsh himself, who lived on for two more years, making good his frequent boast that his reign over 'The Coach and Horses' would equal that of King George III over his realm. The old king died in 1820, and Old Titmarsh did not long survive him. Oliver, now a changed man, because of this occurrence, succeeded to the lease of the inn, and during his landlordship the room remained closed. It has been closed, out of use, ever since."

Mr. Snow brought his story, and his truly excellent dinner, to a close simultaneously. It was I who broke the little silence which followed his concluding words.

"I congratulate you, sir, upon the excellence of your narrative-gift. I hope that if I come to record this affair, as I have already done with respect to certain odd happenings which have come under my view, I shall be able, as nearly as possible, to

reproduce your words." I bowed to our host over my coffee cup.

"Excellent, excellent indeed!" added Carruth, nodding and smiling pleasantly in Mr. Snow's direction. "And now—for the questions, if you don't mind. There are several which have occurred to me; doubtless also to Mr. Canevin."

Snow acquiesced affably. "Anything you care to ask, of course."

"Well, then," it was Carruth, to whom I had indicated precedence in the questioning, "tell us, if you please, Mr. Snow—you seem to have every particular at your very fingers' ends—the purse with the gold? That, I suppose, was confiscated by the train-band captain and eventually found its way back to Sir William Greaves' heirs. That is the high probability, but—do you happen to know as a matter of fact?"

"The purse went back to Lady Greaves."

"Ah! and Forrester's effects—I understand he used the room from time to time. Did he have anything, any personal property in it? If so, what became of it?"

"It was destroyed, burned. No one claimed his effects. Perhaps he had no relatives. Possibly no one dared to come forward. Everything in his possession was stolen, or, what is the same, the fruit of his thefts."

"And—the pistols, 'Jem and Jack?' Those names rather intrigued me! What disposition was made of them, if you happen to know? Old Titmarsh had them, of course, concealed somewhere; probably in that 'cubby-hole' of his which you mentioned."

"Ah," said Mr. Snow, rising, "there I can really give you some evidence. The pistols are in my office—in the Chubbs' safe, along with the holster-apparatus, the harness which Forrester wore under his laced coat. I will bring them in."

"Have you the connection, Mr. Canevin?" Lord Carruth enquired of me as soon as Snow had left the dining-room.

"Yes," said I, "the connection is clear enough; clear as a pikestaff, to use one of your time-honored British expressions, although I confess never to have seen a pikestaff in my life. But—apart from the fact that the holsters are made of leather; the well-known background of the unfulfilled desire persisting after death; and the obvious connection between the point of disappearance of those 'walking-boots' of Billings', with 'the shut room,' I must confess myself at a loss. The veriest tyro at this sort of thing would connect those points, I imagine. There it is, laid out for us, directly before our mental eyes, so to speak. But—what I fail to understand is not so much who takes them—that, by a long stretch of the imagination might very well be the persistent 'shade', 'Ka,' 'projected embodiment' of Simon Forrester. No—what gets me is *—where does the carrier of boots and satchels and jewelers' sample-cases put them?* That room is utterly, absolutely, physically empty, and boots and shoes are material affairs, Lord Carruth."

Carruth nodded gravely. "You have put your finger on the main difficulty, Mr. Canevin. I am not at all sure that I can explain it, or even that we shall be able to solve the mystery after all. My experience in India does not help. But—there is one very vague case, right here in England, which may be a parallel one. I suspect, not to put too fine a point upon the matter, that the abstracted things may very well be behind that rearmost wall, the wall opposite the doorway in 'the shut room'."

"But," I interjected, "that is impossible, is it not? The wall is material—brick and stone and plaster. It is not subject to the strange laws of personality. How——?"

The return of the gentleman-landlord of "The Coach and Horses" at this moment put an end to our conversation, but not to my wonder. I imagined that the 'case' alluded to by my companion would be that of the tortured "ghost" of the jester which, with a revenge-motive, haunted a room in an ancient house and even managed to equip the room itself with some of its revengeful properties or motives. The case had been recorded by Mr. Hodgson, and later Carruth told me that this was the one he had in mind. This, it seemed to me, was a very different matter. However——

Mr. Snow laid the elaborate and beautifully made "harness" of leather straps out on the table beside the after-dinner coffee service. The grips of "Jem and Jack" peeped out of their holsters. The device was not unlike those used by our own American desperadoes, men like the famous Earp brothers and "Doc" Holliday whose "six-guns" were carried handily in slung holsters in front of the body. We examined these antique weapons, murderous-looking pistols of the "bulldog" type, built for business, and Carruth ascertained that neither "Jem" nor "Jack" was loaded.

"Is there anyone on that top floor?" enquired Carruth.

"No one save yourselves, excepting some of the servants, who are in the other end of the house," returned Snow.

"I am going to request you to let us take these pistols and the 'harness' with us upstairs when we retire," said Carruth, and again the obliging Snow agreed. "Everything I have is at your disposal, gentlemen," said he, "in the hope that you will be able to end this annoyance for me. It is too early in the season at present for the inn to have many guests. Do precisely as you wish, in all ways."

Shortly after nine o'clock, we took leave of our pleasant host, and, carrying the "harness" and pistols divided between us, we mounted to our commodious bedchamber. A second bed had been moved into it, and the fire in the grate took off the slight chill of the spring evening. We began our preparations by carrying the high-powered electric torches we had obtained from Snow along the corridor and around the corner to "the shut room." We unlocked the door and ascertained that the two torches would be quite sufficient to work by. Then we closed but did not lock the door, and returned to our room.

Between us, we moved a solidly built oak table to a point diagonally across the corridor from our open bedroom door, and on this we placed the "harness" and pistols. Then, well provided with smoke-materials, we sat down to wait, seated in such positions that both of us could command the view of our trap. It was during the conversation which followed that Carruth informed me that the case to which he had alluded was the one recorded by the occult writer, Hodgson. It was familiar to both of us. I will not cite it. It may be read by anybody who has the curiosity to examine it in the collection entitled *Carnacki the Ghost-Finder* by William Hope Hodgson. In that account it is the floor of the "haunted" room which became adapted to the revenge-motive of the persistent "shade" of the malignant court jester, tortured to death many years before his "manifestation" by his fiendish lord and master.

We realized that, according to the man Billings' testimony, we need not be on the alert before midnight. Carruth therefore read from a small book which he had brought with him, and I busied myself in making the careful notes which I have consulted in recording Mr. Snow's narrative of Simon Forrester, while that narrative was fresh in my memory. It was a quarter before midnight when I had

finished. I took a turn about the room to refresh my somewhat cramped muscles, and returned to my comfortable chair.

MIDNIGHT struck from the French clock on our mantelpiece, and Carruth and I both, at that signal, began to give our entire attention to the articles on the table in the hallway out there.

It occurred to me that this joint watching, as intently as the circumstances seemed to warrant to both of us, might prove very wearing, and I suggested that we watch alternately, for about fifteen minutes each. We did so, I taking the first turn. Nothing occurred—not a sound, not the smallest indication that there might be anything untoward going on out there in the corridor.

At twelve-fifteen, Carruth began to watch the table, and it was, I should imagine, about five minutes later that his hand fell lightly on my arm, pressing it and arousing me to the keenest attention. I looked intently at the things on the table. The "harness" was moving toward the left-hand edge of the table. We could both hear, now, the slight scraping sound made by the leather weighted by the twin pistols, and, even as we looked, the whole apparatus lifted itself—or so it appeared to us—from the supporting table, and began, as it were, to float through the air a distance of about four feet from the ground toward the turn which led to "the shut room."

We rose, simultaneously, for we had planned carefully on what we were to do, and followed. We were in time to see the articles "float" around the corner, and, increasing our pace—for we had been puzzled about how anything material, like the boots, could get through the locked door—watched, in the rather dim light of that short hallway, what would happen.

What happened was that the "harness" and pistols reached the door, and then the door opened. They went through, and the door shut behind them precisely as though someone, invisible to us, were carrying them. We heard distinctly the slight sound which a gently closed door makes as it came to, and there we were, standing outside in the hallway looking at each other. It is one thing to figure out, beforehand, the science of occult occurrences, even upon the basis of such experience as Carruth and I both possessed. It is, distinctly, another, to face the direct operation of something motivated by the Powers beyond the ordinary ken of humanity. I confess to certain "cold chills," and Carruth's face was very pale.

We switched on our electric torches as we had arranged to do, and Carruth, with a firm hand which I admired if I did not, precisely, envy, reached out and turned the knob of the door. We walked into "the shut room". . . .

Not all our joint experience had prepared us for what we saw. I could not forbear clutching Carruth's free arm, the one not engaged with the torch, as he stood beside me. And I testify that his arm was as still and firm as a rock. It steadied me to realize such fortitude, for the sight which was before us was enough to unnerve the most hardened investigator of the unearthly.

Directly in front of us, but facing the blank wall at the far end of the room, stood a half-materialized man. The gleam of my torch threw a faint shadow on the wall in front of him, the rays passing through him as though he were not there, and yet with a certain dimming. The shadow visibly increased in the few brief instants of our utter silence, and then we observed that the figure was struggling with something. Mechanically we concentrated both electric rays on the figure and then we saw clearly. A bulky man, with a bull-neck and close-

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CREATION UNFORGIVABLE

by David H. Keller

"Once again came the whistling, piercing scream."

MY WIFE used to think that I took the writing game too seriously.

"There is no living with you or loving of you when you are at work on a story, and the longer the story, the longer the period of separation," she would say. I always answered her with a laugh and told her that was the penalty that she had to pay for marrying an artist.

For that was the way I looked at my writing. Prosaic enough it might seem to others to sit all day at a little low desk and pound the keys of a little old typewriter. Some of my friends told me that it was a poor way for a man of my ability to spend my time, but again I only answered with a laugh and told them that it made me happy.

All my life so far had been spent in comparative isolation in a little town. My outlook on life was apparently contracted, my opportunity for adventure slight. There were few persons to talk to, and, of those few, none who topped me intellectually. I should have been bitter, unhappy and misanthropic. My writing and

the far-away fields that it took me into were the panacea that made living a happy adventure, in spite of my surroundings.

I sold a story, and then another, and finally was able to buy a broken-down house and fifty acres of land, some miles from the center of the town. My first thought was to make the house livable for the wife. After that I hunted for some place to write. So far, I had been handicapped by the lack of suitable surroundings in which to pound the keys, composing what I hoped would be my masterpiece. Surely in fifty acres there should be some place where a man could find solitude, comfort and, mayhap, inspiration.

And without hunting for it I found it. A small one-room shack, the floor six by ten, the roof hardly six feet from the floor. It was some distance from the house, almost in the shadow of an overhanging ledge of rock and on the edge of a swamp. I went into that swamp once and found the mouth of a cave, but the mosquitoes were so bad that I determined to save further exploration till colder weather.

I was more handy with a typewriter than I was with a saw and hammer; so I put a carpenter to work. First, the roof had to be shingled, and then a new floor was imperative. Some windows supplied light and ventilation, while copper screens kept out the bugs. We put shelves on the walls, and I moved my books out there at the end of one week, and arranged them while a painter dabbled green paint all over the outside. At last I had a place for my desk and my typewriter.

It was a wonderful place to write. There was always light, but all through the day the sunlight was mellowed and softened and changed, either by the green of the trees or the black of the mountain. There was a stillness that was only made more intense by the singing birds and weariless crickets. We liked it, the wife and I, while the baby cried for a whole day when she found that it was going to be a workshop for an author rather than a playroom for a little girl. The wife threatened picnic suppers and I had to arrange for a fireplace and a brass pipe to carry water from a spring up on the hill.

After all was ready, I walked to town and bought five hundred more sheets of paper at the local sell-all store. They handled magazines; "handled" is the right word, for I never heard of anyone's buying any except myself, and I bought only the occasional number with a story in it by myself. With these five hundred sheets of white paper, carbon, a machine and an ideal location, I was sure that I could do something worth while.

My wife insisted that I took the game too seriously, and it is true that while writing I lived the part. My characters were real people to me, right up to the last line, and even to the minute that I wrote "THE END" at the bottom of the page. Only then would they fade and lose, in some way, their definite personalities to me. Not just so many word-people, but actual living persons, induced, for a few hours, to come with me and lead the adventuresome life that I thought out for them.

I loved them all, the heroes, ladies fair but frail, villains, sorry, evil, but, withal, lovable. They were perhaps the children of my creative mind, though at times I felt differently about them. Back of me were my ancestors, two parents and four grandparents and eight great-grandparents. How many, twenty generations back? How many, fifty? Where and who were my ancestors one hundred thousand years ago and what were they doing and how did they live? Part of them was in me. They contributed to making the personality of the unknown author in the forgotten backwash of

a country town. Perhaps when I created, I only brought up from the subconscious, from the deep pit of forgotten memories, portions of the lives of these distant relatives, dead a thousand years or a hundred centuries ago.

When I thought that I was creating, was that all that I was doing? Simply shutting my eyes and telling about the things that I saw these ancestors do? What an interesting conception of creative authorship! And what a merry, happy-go-lucky, hearty family I had in those olden days!

As usual, my wife asked me what I was going to write about next.

"It makes no fiddler's difference to me," she exclaimed for the tenth time, "what you write about, so long as you sell it. What makes me nervous is for you to spend a week or ten days toiling on a story, and then have a dozen editors write you that it is beautiful stuff but that their readers would hardly understand it. Write anything you want to, so long as you write the stuff that the editors will buy, for winter is coming on, and it is going to be a long winter, and I am tired of eating oatmeal and cutting down my old clothes to make dresses for Susanne."

I told her that I was going to write a tale of prehistoric days. I had thought of doing this for a long time, but always other plots thrust it back into obscurity for the time being. Now I recalled that I wanted to write a tale of the past ages. It would be so far past that no one could measure it with the yardstick of historic accuracy and say that I was not true to the facts as known to the dry and musty antiquarians. I wanted to go back to the caveman and the saber-toothed tiger. I wanted to go back to the mammoth and the painting of cave pictures. There was a story there, a tale that I had wanted to fasten on paper for a long time. Now I could do it.

To me it was an interesting story. I wrote ten pages the first day and told my wife the high spots of those ten pages as we spent a half hour on the gallery before going to our bedroom:

"The hero belongs to a race of supermen. They decided to move to the West, the land of the setting sun. Perhaps they wanted to follow the sun on account of the rapid advance of the ice-wall, the glacier in their own country. Their advance is through a strange country, and hardships of every kind make life an uncertain quantity. Not only are they fought by wild animals of a kind they have never seen before, but there are men, half man and half ape, who block their path and try to steal their women. The hero of the story is a young man who is the headman, because he is the bravest and strongest of them all. He is in love with a beautiful amazon in the tribe, who has said that she will not marry till she meets a man who is strong enough to conquer her in a wrestling match. The hero announces that he will endeavor to win this fight the next spring at the time of the yearly festival devoted to the sowing of the harvest and the mating of the unmarried in the tribe. Now, how is that for the beginning of a story of old times?"

My wife yawned.

"Fair," she commented, "but there is nothing original about it. It seems to me that I have read things like that before, and, from what you have told me, there is not a single thought in the whole ten pages that is new."

"You just wait till tomorrow," I answered as I went to sleep.

The next day I did fifteen pages. The hero killed a cave bear, had a hard fight with the chief of the apemen and brought back a horse as a present to his beloved amazon. She took it but made no promises as to

the future. Again I told my wife of the adventures of the invading tribe.

"I am beginning to warm up to these people that I am writing about," I said gravely. "I like them. Today, when the hero was in a fight with the ape-man, I should have let the half ape kill him. He was the better fighter, but I just could not bear to see the poor fellow torn limb from limb; I almost love him, he is so clever and manly; so, just when things seemed the darkest, he remembered a wrestling trick, tossed the ape-man over his back and down a thousand-foot precipice. How is that? The heroine, the wrestling amazon, sees the fight and cries her approval. She joins him and binds up his wounds with some sacred herbs and leaves so that they heal in no time."

"I suppose," my wife asked, "that this amazon is very beautiful?"

"She certainly is. Of course, she is strong as can be, but her muscles are not bunched, and, just to look at her, you would think that she was a delicate young girl. She is a blond——"

"I might have known that!" cried my wife. "Oh, you men! Now, there is just one more woman in the world to keep you from dreaming about me."

"I don't have to dream about you," I whispered softly.

"That is nicely said, at any rate."

I WROTE all morning, and right after dinner of the next day I said that I was going immediately back to the writing shack. Just as I was leaving the house, my wife called me:

"I forgot to tell you. The Jones folks want us to go riding with them this afternoon, stay for supper and bridge, and we shall not be back till nearly midnight. Will you go?"

"I do not want to. I have a very special reason for not wanting to."

"But I think that we had better go."

"All right," I sighed and walked slowly back to the house, "I will go with you, but I am very anxious to write another chapter or two of my story."

"Just why?"

"Oh! I will tell you later on. No use to now."

We went out with the Jones family in their automobile. They, like all other car owners, took us to a dozen places that we did not care to see, and the places that we wanted to see we passed at sixty miles an hour. However, they served a fine supper and they played a very stiff game of bridge. I played poorly that night. Somehow, my mind was not on the game.

We were driven back home at eleven in the Jones automobile. Instead of starting to undress at once, I asked the wife if she would care very much if I took a lantern, went out to the workshop and finished the chapter.

"I have been worried about those people all the time that I was playing cards," I explained, "and that is why I played so poorly. I can not remember the plays and the science of bridge when I am worrying about the people in my stories."

"Well, what is the matter with them now?" the wife asked, sleepily.

"Matter enough. That amazon went hunting in the forest and the ape-folks caught her. The hero heard her cries for help, and without waiting to gather his tribe he dashed off to rescue her. There was a fight, really a very wonderful fight. You would have been pleased to see the way that that chieftain tore those ape-men, but they were too many for him, and at the end they caught him —threw a rock at him and hit him on the head, and when he recovered consciousness he was tied, hand and foot, with grapevines, and the only pleasure that he had out of it was that he was close to the amazon, and she told him at last that she loved him and that, if they ever escaped and lived till the time of the spring festival, she would allow him to throw her in the wrestling match and be his woman

as a consequence. He is very much of a man, and, before I realized it, he was telling her that he was going to conquer her, whether she used her full strength or not, and then they quarreled. Think of that! Both of them captured by ape-men and bound so there was no hope of escape, and then quarreling instead of spending their last hours telling each other how much they were in love."

"Well," yawned my wife, "they are tied there and they will be there tomorrow morning when you start working again; so come to bed."

"But you do not understand. These ape-men do not intend to kill them themselves. They will sacrifice them to their god. There is a cave animal, something like a dragon, and whenever the moon is full, the thing comes out of his cave. The ape-men tie slaves and prisoners to stakes in front of this cave, and in the brilliant light of the full moon this dragon comes out and eats the human sacrifice.

"When I came in to dinner, that was the situation that the hero and the amazon were in. They were tied to the stakes, waiting for the time to come when they would be torn limb from limb. It was to happen that night. I ought to have kept on writing and in some way rescued them from that terrible situation. I had no right to make them and then simply go off and play bridge and let them die—just like dogs or ape-men. To do that was a creation unforgivable. I wish you would let me go out and write just a few pages. I could make a terrible storm come or an eclipse that would make the night dark and frighten the ape-folks into the belief that these white strangers were gods."

"Oh! Let's go to bed. You take these things too seriously," insisted my wife.

"I can not help it," I whispered. "While I am writing the story, it seems in some way that the characters are alive."

But I went to bed. At least, I pretended to go, but I simply waited till certain of the wife's slumbers, and then put on some old clothes, stole downstairs, lit a lantern, and started on the long walk to the little shack at the edge of the woods. I was about two-thirds of the way when I heard a howl, a cry unearthly and deadly in its threatening portent. And after that a woman's voice, terror-stricken—a woman facing horrible death, without hope or help, crying her anguish, because she could not control her longing to live—just one more day. She wanted to live to see the sun shine, to roam through the forest once again. She wanted to wrestle with this man and have the glorious satisfaction of knowing that he was going to conquer her and make her his woman. All these things she longed for, and now she knew the utter hopelessness of it, and in her despair she cried to the pitiless world. And in answer came a gibberish of laughter. The ape-folk were glorying in her despair. Their cup of happiness would be filled if only the man would cry and beg for mercy. And once again came the whistling, piercing scream.

I was angry at myself. What business had I to be playing bridge and let these children of my brain suffer thus? There was still time to rescue them. If only I could reach the typewriter in the next five minutes! I started to run. And now there was a trinity of noises beating in my ears, the snarl of the animal, no longer able to breathe freely on account of his flesh-filled mouth, his blood-choked nostrils; there were a few screams of beings torn apart, who, had they lived, might have been the progenitors of Athenian culture, the forefathers of the best families in Rome. And above and intermingled with these cries of final dying despair came the chuckling, hellish laughter of beings who never, for a million years, would be anything but apes.

I started to run.

"Wait, wait! I am coming! I am not going to let you die! Not that way! Not after I created you and made you possible lords of creation," I cried as I ran, sobbing, and in my despair I caught my toe against a root and fell, head against rock, senseless.

MORNING came. The wife awoke and missed me. Her first thought was that I had gone to the shack on the edge of the woods.

She found me unconscious, fifty yards from the shack. My head was bleeding from the cut on the rock. My clothes were torn, and here and there over my body were long deep scratches, a few of which cut through the skin to the muscles underneath. She was so occupied with me and my condition that she had no eyes for anything else. It took time to call a neighbor and send for a doctor, but at last I was in bed, all tended to and bandaged and very much alive. It seems that my wife spread the news that I had gone out to the shack and met a wildcat. There were cats in the woods; so, the story was credited.

It was two days before I was able to walk to the shack. I begged my wife to let me go alone. For her sake, I took a revolver, though I knew that it was not necessary. She wanted to go, but I just laughed at her fears. So, I walked to the shop where I manufactured stories and people.

The place looked worse than I had suspected. One side of the hut was smashed in as though hit by a terrific battering-ram. The roof sagged; its supports were broken. With the greatest difficulty, I pried open the door and made my way inside. The typewriter was twisted, broken; its delicate steel fingers would never again write magically on white paper. The table was splintered into matchwood, and all of the manuscripts littered the floor in contorted confusion. The papers looked peculiar; even from a distance they had a peculiar smell. I picked one sheet up, and it stuck to my fingers.

I saw the whole truth then.

Those red blotches on the manuscript were blood blots!

There was an oil lamp that had, by some devilish twist of fate, remained unbroken when the antediluvian storm broke over my little world. I emptied the oil on the manuscript, threw a match into it and walked out into the sunlight of God's beautiful world. I started to walk to the house where my wife and baby were waiting for me.

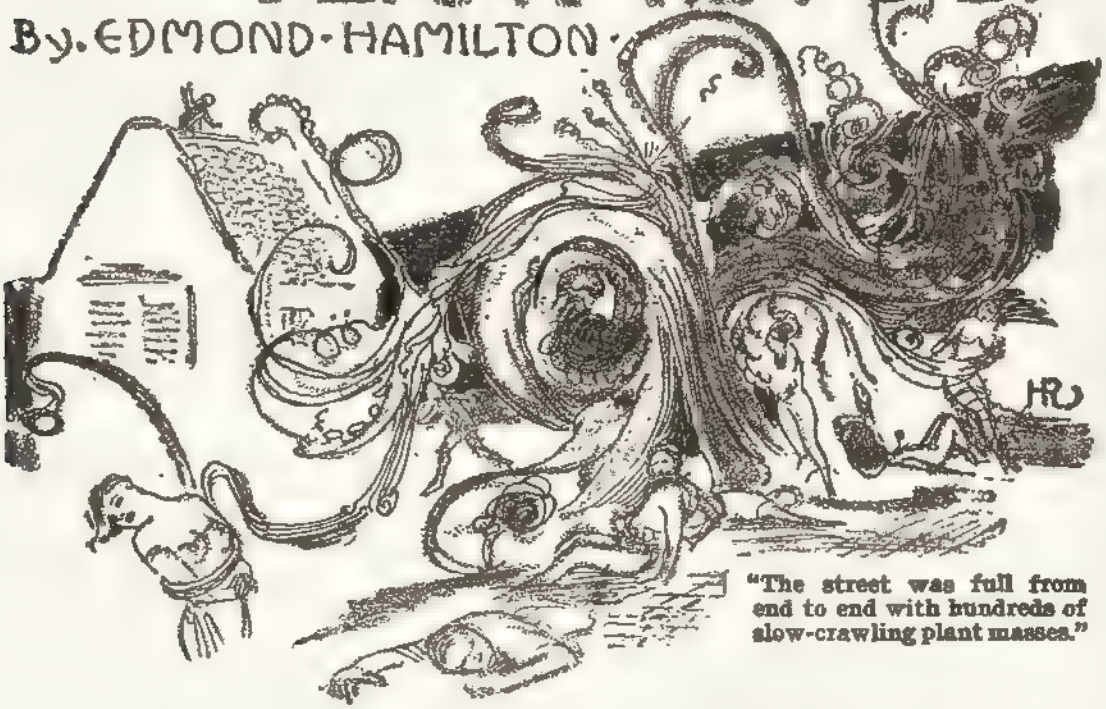
Undecided, I turned, and walked, as though in a dream, to the edge of the swamp, and there I saw tracks in the mud, some as large as the pads of an elephant, and others man-shaped, but with the great toe far apart. Most of these man-footed marks ended at the base of great live oaks, but the large pads, that sank a foot into the ground till they could secure footing for the mass above them—those tracks went on through the woods and ended at the mouth of the cave.

I am never going to go into that cave.

And something else besides the mosquitoes is holding me back.

The PLANT-REVOLT.

By EDMOND HAMILTON



"The street was full from end to end with hundreds of slow-crawling plant masses."

IT IS when I begin this record of the terror that descended upon man and the world of man that I comprehend best the impossibility of ever completely recording that terror. It is when I begin this account of the doom that threatened all our race that I understand best how little our race, of itself, was able to oppose that doom. There is, in the whole story, none of that dramatic sequence of threat and attack and reply that might be expected in such an epic of struggling species. Rather it seems, now, hardly more than a blind welter of giant forces in which is emphasized nothing but the unimportance and helplessness of those who were the final victors.

It is only, therefore, because I, Edward Harley, saw as much of the action of that terror as was seen by any man, that I have taken it upon me to write this record. Two years ago, when there came the first reports of that which was to crumble our world, I was chief morphologist of the botany department of the University of Philadelphia. At the time, of course, there was no thought of the real meaning and importance of those reports. Even I, who by reason of my chosen science could comprehend their strangeness better than most men, had surely no thought of any danger connected with them.

Those first heralds of the approaching doom appeared for the most part as inconspicuous items, published in the Philadelphia and other newspapers early in May. They consisted of reports from a number of gardeners and farmers near the village of Hartville, in the central Pennsylvanian mountains, regarding the curious behavior of the early plantings there. Seeds planted a short time before, they reported, of numberless different

varieties of plant, fruit and vegetable, had grown during that time with a very surprizing rapidity, sending up shoots that would ordinarily not have resulted from a month's growth. This, while extraordinary enough, was not the most astounding feature of the reports, however. That was the fact that these phenomenal shoots and seedlings were almost without roots whatever, and that although stems and shoots continued to develop prodigiously they showed no inclination whatever to develop roots.

It was, certainly, a phenomenon suprizing enough, coming from an area of several score square miles around Hartville, and it was made the more surprizing by the fact that within the next few days similar reports began to come in from growers over half the eastern United States, describing a phenomenal growth of seedlings and a condition of rootlessness exactly similar. By the end of the week the thing had been reported also from England and from California, from Sweden and from Australia, and it began to be realized, by the great press agencies, that the condition was world-wide, whatever its cause. And though but small interest was taken in the matter by the world's vast hordes of city-dwellers, whose knowledge of and interest in all things rural was slight indeed, by those in farming and suburban regions and by botanists it was accorded great attention and discussion.

For by then the thing had become in all truth amazing enough. Not only was the astounding and unnatural growth of rootless shoots continuing, it was reported, but instead of developing leaves as they should their hot-house growth was resulting only in strange, flexible tendrils, while the plants, of all kinds, seemed to have a very great tendency to spread out, to grow horizontally instead of vertically. And, more astonishing still, plants and shrubs and even small trees already growing seemed affected by the same phenomenon, their roots slowly withering away, slowly disappearing, their growth many times accelerated, and their leaves giving way to strange tendrils that pushed forth from axis and stems. Surely no such spring had ever been seen by men, and the climax was capped, some ten days after the first reports, when it was made known that observations showed the more rootless of the plants to have developed a very slow movement or power of movement, an infinitely slow crawling across the ground by means of flexible stems and tendrils.

It is not wonderful that those later reports should have obtained but small credit save among eye-witnesses. Even my own reaction to them was that which I expressed to Dr. Herman Holm, my superior in the university's botany department, in response to his mention of them.

"Plants losing their roots and moving!" I scoffed, as we passed out of the building one morning, and he spoke of them. "That's your modern press—twisting the truth all ways to make a sensation."

"But there does seem something in it, Harley," said Holm quietly. "I was out in the field yesterday and the day before, hunting specimens of *Sarracenia purea* for some work of mine, and there's hardly a species that hasn't changed—hasn't lost part or even almost all of its roots, among the smaller plants, with leaves giving way to tough hollow tendrils."

I stared at him. "You don't really mean to say it's all true?" I asked him. "That the cabbages and celery are losing their roots and walking around arm in arm?"

He laughed at my picture of it, but sobered again. "I'm afraid it's pretty comprehensive," he told me. Then, as we were passing just then down the stone steps, he reached down into the shrubbery bed that encircled the building to pluck forth a small seedling of *Cornus stolonifera*, or dogwood, there. "Look at this," he said,

showing it to me. "You see—the roots are almost gone but the plant is healthy enough, and with tendrils pushing out instead of leaves."

I took it, unbelievingly, but as my eyes ran over it I frowned with quick interest. The little plant was, indeed, a most extraordinary spectacle to the trained eye of a botanist. Its roots, which should have been thick and fibrous, had apparently shrunk and withered until there was left of them but a few thick stubs. The stems had grown greatly recently, it was apparent, but instead of shooting up vertically had spread out in all directions like those of some flat shrubs. Where the leaves should have been sprouting there was a series of little brown tendrils pushing forth, as he had said, tendrils that were hollow but extraordinarily tough and flexible, seeming like continuations of the stems, but obviously taking the place of leaves in drawing the plant's food-elements from the air.

I gazed at it in fascinated interest, then reached down quickly to pull another, which proved exactly the same. I gazed down, then, saw in the bed beside us a small specimen of *Rhamnus cathartica*, a few inches in height, sprawled out flatly also. But when I reached down for it I gave an exclamation of surprize, for in it the roots had dwindled to one or two little projections beneath the base of the stem, and it was only necessary to lift the plant from the ground. Then, as I gazed at it lying flat on my hand in the sunlight, a thing happened which, in spite of the immeasurably greater and more terrible things that I have experienced since, chills me yet with revulsion. The stems of the little plant moved — moved, not by the wind, as for a moment we thought must be the case, but with life—moved blindly, gropingly, over my palm toward my cuff, its tendrils and stems crawling slowly toward it!

With a sharp exclamation I dropped the thing, then looked at Holm with wide eyes. "Like a damn snake in my hand, the thing felt," I said. And then, my wonder surmounting my revulsion: "But this is unprecedented, Holm!"

"For once the newspapers haven't exaggerated," he agreed. "And according to them the same phenomena — the shrinking of roots, the prodigious growth of stems and tendrils, the power of slow movement—are appearing in all but the biggest forms of plant-life, over all earth."

"Unprecedented!" I repeated. "And no one knows what the cause of the thing is?"

"Not the real cause—no," he said slowly. "But I've found that without doubt the immediate cause is——"

HOLM did not finish the sentence for me, a friend joining us at that moment, but I found it finished in the newspapers of the next morning, for in them I found the interviews which their reporters had obtained from Holm after our conversation. By then the world-wide extent of the phenomenon, and its importance, had begun to be realized. Practically every form of plant-life up to the large trees, and especially the ferns and conifers, was developing swiftly along the lines already discovered, roots vanishing, stems spreading, tendrils replacing foliage, and showing in many cases an elementary power of movement. That latter phase of the thing added, indeed, a somewhat comic element to the situation just then, for gardeners and farmers reported that plants of various sorts which had been sown in straight rows had developed such powers of slow movement as in many cases to scatter them random over the fields. It was natural for the newspapers to turn to the botanists for explanations of the thing, and it was natural for those in the Philadelphia region to turn to Dr. Holm, as a botanist of unrivaled reputation.

And the interviews with Dr. Holm

which appeared in that morning's newspapers added to that reputation, since he gave the first clear explanation of the phenomenon which had yet appeared. "It is known to all," Holm said, "that plants are living things even as animals, and that like all living things they require certain food-elements. There are nine elements necessary for the life of plants—carbon, hydrogen, oxygen, nitrogen, sulfur, phosphorus, potassium, calcium and magnesium. The first three of those elements, carbon, hydrogen and oxygen, the plant is able to obtain from the air, chiefly in the form of carbon dioxid and water vapor. The remaining six elements are not present in the air, and must be sought for in the earth, in the soil. Therefore the plant sends down roots into the soil to obtain those six remaining elements and bring them up into the plant, just as the first three are brought down into the plant from the air by the stems and leaves.

"But suppose those six elements were present in the air! Then the plant could obtain them, could obtain all its food-elements, from the air by its stems and leaves and tendrils, and would have no need of roots in the soil. And it is for that reason that the roots of almost all plant-life are now withering, vanishing. Those six latter elements, in the form of gaseous compounds, have been added recently to earth's atmosphere, in quantities detected by the university's chemistry laboratories and other laboratories also recently, quantities so small as to be hardly detectable by us, but large enough to furnish all plant-life with those elements, to make their roots unnecessary, to atrophy and wither away those roots as is now being done. It may be that those gaseous compounds, those six elements, have been poured forth into our atmosphere by volcanic craters or fissures opening in the earth's crust, or it may be that earth is passing through a cloud of such gases in space, but the fact is clear that it is the addition of those gases to earth's atmosphere that is causing this great change in earth's plant-life.

"Neither is it surprizing that with roots vanishing the plant-forms are acquiring a power of free movement. It will be recalled that my own former associate, Dr. Jackson Mandall of the University of Philadelphia, whose disappearance two years ago was such a loss to the science of botany, was strongly of the opinion that plants, if spared the necessity of roots by obtaining all needed elements from the air, would swiftly develop powers of movement. It was Dr. Mandall's theory that plant-forms are in reality as living and conscious as animal-forms, but are bound to immobility and torpor by their roots alone, and that if the necessity of roots were removed from them they would equal animals in powers of movement. That theory seems in some sense borne out by the changes of the last weeks in the plant-life of earth.

"But how long will these changes continue? That is less easy to say, since it depends directly upon how long these gaseous compounds of the six elements mentioned continue to be poured into our atmosphere. If, as seems most probable, they are being poured forth by volcanic fissures, the outpouring of them will doubtless subside soon, and the changes in plant-life cease. Plants that have lost their roots altogether during this period of change will likely be entirely and almost immediately killed by the ceasing of this outpouring of the gaseous compounds, since without roots they will have no methods of gaining the six needed elements when that outpouring ceases. But if that outpouring of gases ends soon it will be found, I think, that earth's plant-life will for the most part soon return to its former state. Of course,

a continued outpouring of such gases into the atmosphere over a period of time would result in an increase of plant powers of movement and other powers to an unpredictable extent, but it is unnecessary to say that no one anticipates such a condition."

This was the substance of Dr. Holm's statement on the matter, and coming as it did from the man who, since the disappearance of his brilliant associate, Dr. Mandall, was recognized as the nation's leading botanist, it was considered final. The phrases which he had used concerning the temporary quality of the phenomenon had a soothing effect on those who had begun to show concern over the world's food supply. And though the gaseous compounds of the six elements mentioned were undeniably present in earth's atmosphere, it was taken for granted, as he had said, that the outpouring of them from whatever source they came would soon cease. Thus the effect of Dr. Holm's statement was to diminish considerably the sensation that had been caused by the thing, and although it was still featured by the press in the next few days, it was in a somewhat lower key.

While the thing was of utmost interest to myself, as a botanist, I had small enough time to spend in studying it, being just then occupied in preparing examinations for my classes. Dr. Holm, I had reason to believe, was devoting close study to it, and though I did not see him in those next few days I heard that he was very much occupied. Except for a few botanists like him, though, the increasing changes of the plants in those next days got little enough attention. Enough there were to consider in dismay the odd and leafless condition of their tendril-clustered shrubs, to exclaim over the rootlessness of their garden plants, to worry concerning their oddly behaving crops, to shout with laughter at the sight of slow tendrils moving blindly, gropingly, painfully, of small plants crawling infinitely slowly over the soil. But surprize and worry and laughter were all that were aroused by these phenomena that were, unknown to all of us, the first heralds of the terror that was to come—the first far-off flares of lightning from the oncoming storm of panic and horror and crashing doom.

2

It was just five days after Dr. Holm's statement that the Hartville horror burst upon the peoples of earth.

Looking back upon that horror now, I think that it was its utter unexpectedness that made it most terrible. Dr. Holm had, indeed, in his statement, admitted that the great changes in earth's plant-life might continue to an unpredictable extent, were the outpouring of gaseous compounds into earth's atmosphere to continue. And that that outpouring, whatever its source, was continuing, was known to all from the daily chemical analyses made of the atmosphere. But despite the fact that we all thus knew the changes must be continuing, none of us, not even Dr. Holm or myself, ever dreamed of what thing was to come of those changes for Hartville and for the world.

Hartville was that village in the central Pennsylvanian mountains from which the first reports of changes in plant-life had come, and in the succeeding days the changes that were taking place over all earth seemed more advanced at Hartville than at any other place. The village itself was made up of one or two straggling streets of homes, with some three or four hundred inhabitants, and with a few places of business. It lay at the bottom of a deep valley between two spurs of the eastern Appalachians, and all about it

stretched the thick green forest, covering the mountains on each side even over their flat summits, lapping over the deep valley like a green sea of vegetation in which the village and its clearing were the only island. There were few farms in that section, most of the villagers being retired farmers from farther up the valley.

The changes in plant-life that were to be seen later over all the world had been first observed by these villagers in their gardens and in the surrounding forest, and in the days that had followed, while those changes were taking place over all earth, it had been clearly evident that they were farther advanced always in the region about Hartville. The plant-life there was losing its roots faster, was developing more tendrils, was acquiring a greater power of slow crawling movement. They had reported, too, that almost all plant-life save the larger trees was tending to change into what seemed a single form, so far as could be seen—an octopus-like plant-mass, a thick rootless stem with many branching tendrils. Many of these plants had been seen crawling very slowly and blindly through the forests about the village.

And these plant-masses, they asserted, had developed also another curious power, more unusual even than that of movement, being none other than the power of catching and devouring insects. This, of course, had always been a power of certain plants such as the sundew and Venus flytrap and others, but now was shared by all the plant-masses that were the result of the changing plant-life about the village. Observation showed that they accomplished this by grasping with their tendrils any beetle or insect or even small bird which settled upon them, gripping it so tightly as to kill it at once. Held thus, a green and sticky fluid was exuded from the tendril-walls upon the dead insect, a fluid recognized by some of botanical training as a modified form of chlorophyl, that mysterious chemical by means of which plants are able to transform the food-elements they obtain. This had the effect of swiftly disintegrating and decaying the body of the creature held, so swiftly indeed that within an hour or less almost all of it would have been drawn down into the stem of the plant-mass through the hollow tendrils, those tendrils then releasing whatever shell or bone or hard part of the body was left.

It was this new phase of the phenomenon, certainly the most sensational so far, that took Dr. Holm and me to Hartville on the day after that on which we heard of it.

"Something strange there is in that Hartville region, Harley," he had said to me. "Why should the changes of plant-life have occurred there first? Why should they be farther advanced there than over the rest of earth, unless it is there that the gaseous compounds causing those changes are pouring into earth's atmosphere?"

"But that seems impossible," I said. "Those gases are supposed to be coming from volcanic craters or fissures, and none have opened there——"

"Impossible—perhaps so," he said, thoughtfully, "but perhaps something which we would deem even more impossible is going on there now—something that, with these plant-masses forming and moving there, as they are beginning to form and move over all earth, may mean dread menace to our earth! I'll not explain now, Harley, but we leave for Hartville in the morning."

So it was that late on the next afternoon we entered Hartville, pressing along the rough mountain roads and up the narrow valley between the looming bulk of the mountains on either side until we drove at last into the village. A peaceful

spot it seemed, to Dr. Holm and me, a neat little mass of white-painted frame buildings, lying there deep between the giant-like mountains that rose to east and west, with all about it the forest's encircling thickness. We found it, though, in a state of very perceptible excitement, knots of conversing villagers gathered along its street. And when Dr. Holm had announced his identity and was recognized as the famous botanist, some two score of them gathered about us, eager to show us at once the extraordinary things going on about them.

And extraordinary they were, we found, when we accompanied our numerous guides to the edge of the forests that lapped the village round on all sides. For though Dr. Holm and I had noted something of the unusual character of those forests on our drive to the village, we realized now for the first time their truly fantastic appearance. They seemed like the forests of another planet, the greater trees leafless, bearing upon every branch masses of tendrils. And here and there inside the forest's edge were crawling slowly and gropingly a few of the plant-masses that had been described. Some were but a few inches in diameter, and some were all of six feet, but great or small they seemed all of the same form, octopus-like masses of tendrils on thick rootless stems, groping blindly and very slowly about. Farther back in the encircling forests, we were told, there were believed to be great numbers of the things, but since one or two dogs of the village had failed to return from a venture there a day before none of the villagers had been hardy enough to desire further exploration of them for the time being.

Dr. Holm was very silent, solemn almost, as we examined the great tendril-covered trees and the few plant-masses in sight, and as we walked back down the village street with our excited guides I saw him glancing up with a puzzled air toward the forested summits of the mountains and heard him discussing some feature of them with those about him. He did not confide to me, though, whatever thoughts filled him, telling those of the village only that we would make a comprehensive investigation of the forests on the morrow. And when we had returned to the little frame hotel and sat upon its veranda after dinner watching the sunset purple and darken over the western mountains, Dr. Holm was silent still. Gazing out toward those mountains over the dark masses of the forest about us, my own thoughts were not on the morrow's plans but on the crawling plant-masses that had formed here, that would be beginning to form over all the world. What could be causing these stupendous changes? And what was to be their end?

DARKNESS had lain over the village for but a few hours when Dr. Holm and I rose to retire. Already, I saw, the yellow-lighted windows scattered about us were going black, one by one, and by the time I parted from Holm at his door and entered my own room to gaze forth from its window, darkness lay almost completely over the sleeping village. Sleeping there in the white starlight it lay, its encircling forests dark about it, its bordering mountains brooding above it, and for minutes I gazed forth over it, with strange thoughts. When I did turn and enter my bed, however, I found myself so drowsy from our day's rough journey that I fell almost at once into a dreamless sleep.

A village sleeping—a world sleeping—as its doom crept upon it. . . .

It was a scream that brought me back to wakefulness hours later, a wild scream from the village street that was followed instantly by others and that brought me erect in bed,

trembling. All was still dark about me, and I sensed that it was but an hour or so before dawn. Then as I sat there, tense, there came a final terrible scream from the street, followed by a series of choking gasps, and then by silence. I gazed forth, trembling more with amazement than any other emotion, but could see nothing in the darkness outside, so sprang from bed, hastily donning my clothes, and aware as I did so that a rising tumult was sounding across the village—an opening of doors and windows, a sound of hoarse shouts, and of more screams of terror. By then I was at Holm's door, but when I flung it open it was to find his room empty, his bed apparently not slept in. Stunned by his absence, I heard the hoarse voice of the hotel's proprietor beneath me, raced down the stairs with him, and then as he opened the door there met our eyes in the street outside, under the pale starlight, a sight that to this day chills me with terror to remember. The street was full from end to end with hundreds of slow-crawling plant-masses!

Plant-masses! Plant-masses in hordes, in hundreds, in thousands, that thronged thick in the street before me, that swarmed through all the village, that poured in still other thronging hordes into the village from all the surrounding forests! Plant-masses that had gathered in a mass at one place in the street, their numberless tendrils gripping the dead, crushed body of one of the villagers, exuding sticky green fluid upon it! Plant-masses that had swiftly gripped with those tendrils, those countless arms of theirs, the astounded, half-clad people who had ventured into the street in answer to those wild screams, and who now were themselves screaming as the hordes of plant-things pulled them down! Motionless I gazed, my mind reeling with horror, and then the crawling masses beneath, before me, had brushed against me, had felt my presence there and that of the man beside me, and before we could draw back had whipped forth with myriad tendrils to catch and hold us, to draw us down toward them!

Never afterward have I been able to collect into coherent form my memories of the moments that followed. I remember screaming like a trapped animal, screaming as the hotel-owner beside me was screaming, as we were drawn resistlessly downward by those clutching tendrils. I remember struggling madly in their grip, and of being aware, even in that nightmare-like moment of struggle, of the things about me; of the men and women and children even along that street's length in the darkness caught by those octopus-like crawling masses that swarmed about them, drawn down and inward by their clutching tendrils; of dead bodies held within those tendrils' grip and covered rapidly with exuding green fluid, the plant-masses still clutching them tightly; of hordes of the blindly groping things that poured in creeping floods through the doors and windows of houses, that sought out their screaming prey within those houses until with their numbers they had cornered it, blindly as ever; and of greater and greater hordes of the plant-masses that crawled steadily still into the doomed village from all about it, thronging through and among its buildings from end to end!

These things flashed before my vision in that moment like some strange cinema of horror as I was drawn downward by the tendrils that held me. Then with a sudden revulsion that awoke me from the stupefaction of horror that had made my struggles but weak, I struck out with all my force at the things that held me, strove to tear from me the clinging tendrils that had coiled about me. But those tendrils were

like tough ropes holding me, and while I tore one loose two others were grasping me, so that steadily I was being drawn downward, still other plant-masses swarming about me. I saw that the man beside me had been pulled to the ground by three great plant-masses that had gripped him, and that with their deadly grip about him his wild threshing was swiftly ceasing, the green sticky fluid from them coating him swiftly as they held him in their grip still, while four others of the great octopus-like things had gripped me. Against that deadly grip my struggles were useless, and even as I tore at the things that held me I knew myself weakening, surrendering. Then, with a sudden last inspiration, my hand went to the long pocket at my thigh, jerked from it and opened the long, thin and keen botanical knife which that pocket held.

The next moment I had cut with wild slashes the dozen or more of tendrils that held me, and as they waved blindly about, dripping green fluid, I reeled to one side from them. Along the starlit street the wild screams of those captured by the plant-masses had lessened, had almost ceased, and as I staggered to one side now I saw that I was all but alone living among the hordes of thick-swarming plant-things that filled the village, though here and there everywhere masses of them were clutching dead bodies, coating them with their green disintegrating fluid, settling to devour them, to ingest them, as a python devours its victims. And at that sight the last remnants of reason left my horror-stunned mind, and I staggered into the street mindless of the plant-masses that crawled in hundreds within it, slashing my way with blind, crazed fury through them as I staggered on.

On—on—dazedly, insanely, gripped by tendrils of the plant-masses that swarmed about me and that I slashed wildly away, reeling on without knowledge of direction or purpose, throwing myself frenziedly forward with whirling blade until the village was behind me, the village silent now with the silence of death and swarming with the numberless crawling plant-masses. On I staggered, into the encircling forests and up the forested slopes, as even then the few survivors of the village behind me were staggering north and south to carry the word of Hartville's doom to the world—on at a shambling run, stumbling through the night with fixed eyes as one might stumble in a dream, on and on and on.

3

THE gray light of dawn was filtering through the forest about me when I came at last to my senses, when the mists of horror lifted at last from my brain. Trembling, shaken still to my innermost being by those dread scenes through which I had passed, I gazed about me. I was high on the forested slope of the great mountain west of Hartville, I found. Around me rose the silent ranks of the great trees, trees the sight of which renewed my horror, since I saw now that the great roots they had formerly had were fast dwindling to stubby projections, and that the masses of tendrils they bore upon their branches were waving slowly about with hideous life. The trees, too, I saw, were changing, changing into great plant-masses, great plant-monsters, as the smaller forms of plant-life had already done. Soon they too would be able to crawl forth at will, great plant-monsters that with the smaller plant-masses would spread untold horror before them!

I gripped myself, though, striving to consider my situation. Impossible it was to return to Hartville, for that was swarming now with the hordes

of plant-masses that had swept all life from it. To remain in the forests was equally impossible, since not only with every hour were the great trees about me gaining in horrible life and power, but there swarmed here also about me numberless plant-masses, many of which, large and small, I could see even then crawling through the trees not far from me. I could not expect help from the outside world, I knew, since even now the terrible metamorphosis that had taken place about Hartville would be taking place over all earth, and even now the plant-masses would be forming and crawling forth over all earth as they had done here, to spread a terror before them that nothing could resist. It was the revolt of all earth's plant-life that was going on, the plant revolt that had begun here at Hartville and that by now would be sweeping the world!

"Holm!" I whispered, my thoughts shifting suddenly to my friend. "Holm gone—and I——"

Abruptly I made decision, swiftly turned. My one chance was to escape from the forest about me to some more barren region, at least, and since I dared not return down into the valley I must surmount the mountain summit, strike out into the country beyond. I knew well that infinitely small were my chances of escaping the crawling plant-masses that swarmed about me, the great tree-monsters that were developing swiftly from the trees about me, but it was the single chance left me; and without weighing risks further I started up the slope toward the summit far above, hoping against hope that I might glimpse from that summit some plantless region where I might find refuge from this mighty plant revolt that was springing into being over all the world.

The time that followed, the hours of that day that I toiled unceasingly upward with the sun circling the heavens above me, live in my memory now only as an interminable period in which I struggled up the steep slope through forests fantastic as of some dream. Through forests of great trees whose flexible tendrils leaned toward me as I passed them, striving to grip me and actually gripping me twice before I could slash myself loose; through forests of trees stirring with hideous life among which roamed plant-masses large and small and as hideous, octopus-like plant-masses that crawled toward me with ever-increasing speed, it seemed to me, apprised by some strange sense of my presence, and from which I was hard pressed to escape; on and on upward I toiled, with tree-monsters and plant-masses ever increasing in power and in rapidity of movement about me, until I came at last with sunset to the last thinly forested slope that led up to the mountain's flat summit.

Halting with panting lungs at that slope's bottom, I saw that about me were no more of the plant-masses, guessed that it was because on these wind-swept heights had grown no smaller plant-forms from which those plant-masses could form. The trees about me, though—naturally stunted trees whose gnarled and looped trunks were unnatural to begin with—seemed even further endowed with terrible life than any I had yet seen, their roots all but completely vanished, they themselves appearing but great masses of reaching tendrils that had begun to endeavor, though fruitlessly so far, to draw themselves over the ground, tree-monsters that reached myriad tendrils toward me as I passed them, that strove to draw themselves toward me by those tendrils! Shuddering, sick to my soul with horror, I struggled on, up that last slope.

Reeling from exhaustion, I labored upward, through the tree-things upon the slope, slashing aside their reaching tendrils that touched and grasped me, upward until I was

clambering onto the broad flat summit of the mountain. Even as I had climbed a dim, dull roaring sound as of the far rush of mighty winds had been coming to my ears, and now as I clambered up onto the summit's surface that roar came to me much louder. For the moment, though, I heeded it not, gazing about me, the light of sunset now full before me.

The summit on which I stood was flat and irregular of outline, seeming to me about half a mile across. Upon it there were numbers of thick, gnarled trees like those on the slopes, tree-monsters whose massed tendrils shot menacingly toward me as I advanced between them, and which with mighty efforts of those tendrils strove to draw their great masses toward me. By quick movements, though, I managed to stumble between them, and then was through them, had reached the edge of a circular clearing that had been made there at the flat summit's center, a clearing that occupied the greater part of its surface and that was ringed round completely by the writhing-tendriled tree-monsters. As I stumbled out from the menace of those reaching tendrils into that clearing the dull roaring sound I had heard before burst upon my ears loudly. And as it did so I stopped short, stunned, heedless for the moment of the reaching tree-things behind me.

For at the center of the flat clear space before me there yawned a pit of a thousand feet in diameter, whose rock walls sank downward and out of the line of my vision, apparently to great depths. And it was from this mighty pit that there came the roaring sound I had heard; for up from that pit was rushing a terrific torrent of what seemed mighty winds, a colossal upshooting current of wind or air or gases that was visible to my eyes only as an unceasing flicker in the air, but that I knew must be of awful speed and power. At the same time there came to my nostrils a strong and acrid odor of chemicals that I had already noticed on the slope below, an odor of mingled gases. The great change that had taken place, was taking place, in all earth's plant-life, that had taken place here most rapidly of all places—the great *man-made* pit or shaft before me that was flinging terrific quantities of gaseous compounds into the atmosphere unceasingly—my mind staggered beneath the import of these things, and stunnedly, dazedly, I gazed farther about me.

Across the clearing's width from me, on the other side of the great shaft, I glimpsed now what seemed a row of squat steel windmills of strange design, whose vanes were whirling and which seemed connected by rods to machinery or dynamos in a small concrete building beneath them. From that building heavy wires led around the clearing's edge toward me, and as my eyes followed them I saw that they led into another low concrete building a few hundred feet to my right, that stood by the great shaft's edge. The wires passed behind a great black panel of electrical controls and dials that stood just inside the building's wide door, and from behind this panel in turn other wires led to the great shaft's edge, disappearing down over that edge in a thick steel cable.

THE crimson sunset illumined all things about me, and dazedly I stared, until a sound behind me made me whirl around with suddenly renewed terror. It was but the great tree-monsters behind me, though, straining their tendrils out toward me in a vain attempt to reach me, a myriad twisting, flexible arms groping toward me. They could not reach me, but all the terror that they inspired in me returned, and I turned quickly away from them toward the concrete building to my

right. Stealthily I approached it, keeping out of line of the open door and the open window in the contiguous wall, and finally was crouching beneath that window. And as I reached it, as I crouched silently beneath it, a voice from within came clearly out to me.

"——and make you see, Holm, what chance you had of preventing me, of preventing that which I have decreed for the destiny of the world!"

Holm! At that name, at that clear voice, I gasped, and then as that voice ceased I raised myself, slowly, silently, until my eyes were above the level of the window beneath which I crouched. Two men were in the room into which I was gazing, I saw instantly, a long room littered with masses of electrical and chemical apparatus of every description. Two men, one of whom sat against the wall opposite me, arms and legs bound tightly, and whom I recognized with pounding heart as Holm! He sat silent there, despair upon his face, and facing him, back toward me, was another man, a tall, big-shouldered man with tawny hair, a pistol in his belt. Even as I saw him that man turned slightly toward me, and as I glimpsed the strong, hawk-like profile, the burning gray eyes, I could hardly repress my cry. For it was Mandall! That former associate of Holm's whose fame as Dr. Jackson Mandall, the brilliant botanist, had been world-wide until his disappearance two years before!

And as I gazed in stupefaction at the two figures I understood at last what theory concerning the great plant-change it had been that had disturbed Holm, understood that he had suspected Mandall to be associated in some way with it, understood too, now, that Holm must have gleaned some hint from his conversation with the villagers that had brought him to this mountain-top to investigate, on the night before, without awakening me or disclosing to anyone his suspicions, had brought him here just before the horror had burst upon Hartville, to be discovered and captured by Mandall. But now Mandall was speaking on, mockingly, to the silent Holm, and as I crouched there beneath the window in the dying light of sunset I forgot all else in that which he was disclosing. The swaying, waving-tendriled tree-monsters at the clearing's edge, the great shaft whose mighty currents roared upward at its center, the horror through which I had come — all these seemed to vanish for the time about me as I listened to that mocking voice.

"Stupid, Holm, stupid, for you to attempt to thwart my purposes. But you were always so, even when we worked side by side in the university's botanical laboratories, always working from your unchanging human—animal—point of view, never doubting in the least but that all plant-life had been put on earth for the sole purpose of being useful to us animals—us humans! Never taking the *plant* view of it, never considering that a plant may be and is a more perfect organism than any animal, and that as such it should have a better right to dominate the world than those crude botches of life that make up animal life, human life.

"You think me mad, Holm! I see it in your eyes—see it as I used to see it when I suggested some of these things to you. But why am I not right?—why are not the plant-races equal to, and superior to, the animal races? A plant lives, even as animals live. It breathes as they breathe. It sleeps as they sleep and awakens as they awaken. It eats and drinks as they eat and drink, though in an infinitely superior manner, taking the raw and inorganic elements for its nourishment. You knew all this, Holm, you knew the work of Bose and Kasenin and Taylor, you knew

that they have proved that plants can feel pain and can shrink from pain, can be intoxicated by certain substances and can reach toward the pleasure of intoxication, can feel even as animals can feel, and when given the power, can fight their enemies even as animals do. Plants that catch and kill insects and tiny animals in a myriad ingenious ways, plants that feign death when approached by enemies, plants that store water against the dry season—you knew of these and a myriad others, yet you would not admit that plants have consciousness, intelligence.

"But I knew that they did, Holm; I knew that it was in fact only their immobility that had restricted the plant-races, their roots that were necessary for them to gain their food-elements from the soil. If they had no such roots, if they were able to move at will as animals were able to move, I knew that they would sweep all human and animal life before them from the face of the earth if they could be freed from that immobility, that necessity of roots. Even rooted as they were to earth, helpless before all attackers, they had maintained themselves; and once able to move they would take the offensive, would crowd all other life from earth until they alone existed upon it. A plant world, Holm! It was my ideal, a plant world in which the plant-races would be free to develop their powers, their intelligence, even as the other animals and man have developed, a plant world in which a mighty civilization of the cool-minded plant-races might some day develop!

"It was my dream, that, and I resolved to attain it, to loose the great *plant-races in full power upon earth*, to wipe out all those animal species to which I myself, to my misfortune, belonged. So I set to work, Holm, set to work on the most gigantic task, surely, ever attempted, the task of reversing the order of domination of species that had reigned for such eons on earth, of raising up the plant-races to rule and of annihilating for all time the animal races. To do that but one thing was necessary, and that was to give the plants power of movement, to release them from the roots that bound them to earth and to send them thus onto earth in a resistless flood. And there was a way, I saw, in which that might be accomplished.

"That way was simple enough in principle. Of the nine food-elements required by all plants, but carbon, hydrogen and oxygen are present in the atmosphere in a form obtainable by plants. The remaining six—nitrogen, potassium, sulfur, phosphorus, calcium and magnesium—the plant-races could obtain only by sending roots down into the soil. If I were to add those six elements to the earth's atmosphere, in the form of gaseous compounds, the plant-life of earth would be able to obtain them from the air, and would need roots no longer. And since it is nature's rule to swiftly atrophy or wither any part of a living creature no longer used or needed, the roots of all plant-life would swiftly vanish, and it would swiftly adapt itself to new forms, would swiftly become able to move, to pour forward in resistless, mighty hordes upon animals and men and the cities of men. I needed only to add those gaseous compounds to the atmosphere, therefore, to cause a colossal plant revolt over all the earth!

4

"So I set myself to cause that plant revolt, in that way. Gathering together all funds I could command I *disappeared completely from my accustomed life*, from the university. My plan required that I find some spot on earth's surface where all of the six elements I required were present in quantities, and for long I searched for such a place, finding

often mineral deposits holding compounds of four or even five of those elements, but lacking some. At last, however, I found the place I sought, here on the summit of this mountain above Hartville. The tests I made showed me that at a certain depth were present all the elements I needed, and so at once I began to prepare to use them.

"To cover my plans I announced myself in Hartville and elsewhere as a mine-prospector, and for that expressed reason caused the great shaft here in the summit to be sunk to the depth of the minerals I needed. I had this building erected, had new type windmills placed and connected with dynamos to give me an unfailing supply of power, and then when all the supplies and equipment I needed were here I announced myself as dissatisfied with results and abandoned the place. Thus it was soon forgotten by all who knew of it, and in a few weeks I could come back secretly and begin work here without anyone knowing of my existence.

"My problem was a great one, to release the six elements I needed from their mineral compounds in the great shaft's depths, and to build them up again into gaseous compounds that could be poured up into the atmosphere. It was by electrolysis that I solved that problem, the method of passing electric currents through compounds to break them down into their original elements. By means of great electrical projectors set in the great shaft's depths I could do that, could release the elements needed from their mineral compounds. These were automatically conveyed to still other projectors of different type, which reversed the principle and built the elements up into gaseous compounds, and these gaseous compounds being shot up by the projectors through the shaft rushed in a great torrent into earth's atmosphere, being diffused into it high above and carried swiftly into every portion of the atmosphere by the unceasing rush of air about the globe.

"I had succeeded in the first step of my plan, and so I began it, turned on the great projectors beneath, and sent the giant current of gaseous compounds shooting upward to mingle with the atmosphere. I knew that a comparatively small proportion of these gaseous compounds in the atmosphere would be sufficient to supply with those six elements all the plant-life on earth, and knew too that as long as I kept the great shaft's current of those compounds rushing into the atmosphere, kept replenishing the supply of those compounds, the plant-life of earth would change and continue to change, would swiftly lose its roots and acquire powers of movement. It would be necessary for me, of course, to keep that great current of gases always rushing upward, since were the supply of those compounds in the atmosphere not replenished, were the needed elements to fail, the plant-life of earth that had lost its roots would then not be able to obtain those elements at all, having no roots and no longer being able to get them from the air, and all such rootless plant-life would die almost at once.

"It would be necessary, therefore, to keep the great shaft's gases rushing into the atmosphere unceasingly, since were it turned off all the newly formed rootless plant-forms would swiftly perish. I could keep it turned on, though, could keep it operating without trouble, and so with the gaseous compounds from it rushing up into the atmosphere I began to watch for the changes in plant-life that I knew would soon occur. And even as I expected, those changes began first around the mountain itself, around Hartville, since it was this region that was closest to the source of the gases and naturally was thus soonest affected by them.

"I watched, Holm, and saw the plant-life about me changing, saw the

smaller plants on the mountain's slopes swiftly losing their roots, swiftly acquiring tendrils instead of leaves — tendrils that replaced the leaves, as I saw, because they could more efficiently obtain and ingest the nine elements now taken from the air instead of three. And, drawing themselves slowly over the ground with those tendrils, the plants acquired power of movement. Adapting themselves to their new powers and conditions they were changing into what seemed a common form, an octopus-like plant-mass with many branching tendrils that could draw it over the ground. And with those tendrils, too, the plant-masses could soon catch and devour insects and small birds, and I knew then that my theory had been correct to the last iota, and that given power of movement the plant-races could meet the animal races on equal terms and could vanquish them.

"I watched that change going on upon the mountain, safe from it myself since there was no smaller plant-life on the mountain's summit or upper slopes to form plant-masses that might menace me. And I knew that it was going on, more slowly, over all the world. The radio set I had brought with me informed me of those changes that were puzzling the whole world—changes of which none, not even you, Holm, had suspected the true meaning. And still, here on the mountain those changes were continuing, and even the stunted trees here on the summit were being affected, were changing as all trees and plants were changing, were putting forth masses of tendrils and were swiftly losing their roots, were striving also for power of movement. I watched their changes here on the summit, knowing that I could destroy them if I wished at any time before they could become dangerous to me, and I saw them change—saw the plant-masses that had formed by thousands in the forests about the mountain changing still, too, becoming swiftly more and more active and powerful. And so, last night, they had reached such a state of activity that they were able to pour down in all their hordes into the village in search of the animal food they sensed there, to strike the first great blow of the plant-races at the world!

"And so last night, Holm, you came here; came on the hint those village fools had given you of mining operations that had taken place here; came up through the forests and managed to evade the swarming plant-masses to get here, to find *me* here, to walk into my hands. And here but minutes ago, Holm, you heard from the radio as I did how even now the peoples of earth crumble beneath the attack of the plant-races; how plant-masses in countless hordes are swarming outward from this region and sweeping the life from villages as they did from Hartville; how all methods of defense against them, gun or shell or gas, have not been able to halt them in their outward sweep; how over all earth at this moment earth's plant-life is changing to plant-masses like them, the trees beginning to change to great tree-monsters as those here have changed; and how even now earth's peoples flee in panic from this terror from which there can be no flight. For with every hour earth's plant-life changes as it has changed here, and when it shall have completely formed itself over all earth it will sweep all other living creatures from the face of earth and leave the great plant-races supreme upon it for all time!"

MANDALL'S voice ceased, and to me, crouching there beneath the window in the fading light of sunset, it seemed that all things about me—the great shaft and its roaring current of gases, the building against which I crouched, the great tree-things whose masses of tendrils whipped restlessly about — that all these things were turning swiftly

about me as I listened to that doom which one man had cast upon the world. Then as my spinning brain steadied a little I raised myself again to the window's edge, peered inside it. Mandall was regarding Holm still with his burning eyes, and as I looked I saw Holm raise his head and face him.

"Mandall, you're mad!" he said. "To send this terror upon earth—to raise these plant-creatures against your own race——"

"My own race!" cried Mandall in mad anger. "My own race, a race of botched animals—a race that I disown! The plant-races shall be master, shall sweep it and all others from the face of earth!"

He wheeled toward the open door, took a step outside, his eyes gazing burningly out over the scene without, out over the straining tree-monsters at the clearing's edge and beyond them, out over the great vista of mountains and valleys that lay dusky now beneath the sunset's fading light. And as he did so I clung there for the moment incapable of motion, the horror that had weighed upon my mind with each passing hour seeming to numb it now from further action. The great plant-mass hordes that had swept over Hartville and that were sweeping now over all the region about it, the infinitely greater plant-mass throngs that were forming in millions over all the face of earth, soon to sweep humanity from the face of earth—these things that I had just heard seemed to stun my mind and will together.

I strove, though, to gather my whirling thoughts, and raised myself a little farther above the window's level. Holm was sitting still opposite me, head down, in all his attitude expressing clearly the unutterable despair that filled him. I gazed fearfully toward Mandall, standing still outside the building's door, his back toward us, then made a swift motion. Holm, however, had not looked up, had not seen, and now in something like desperation I gave utterance to a low hiss, hardly audible. It was heard by Holm, though, for he looked quickly up at sound of it, and then was staring at me with suddenly widening eyes, a cry of recognition upon his lips.

I silenced him in time with a frantic gesture, though, then pointed questioningly toward Mandall, outside the door. Holm looked toward him, his eyes alight now with hope, and then shook his head silently, motioning with his head in explanation toward the pistol plainly in sight in Mandall's belt. He nodded swiftly toward his own bonds, and I divined instantly that he wished me to release him, and that whereas two of us might overcome Mandall in spite of his pistol one could not hope to do it. I glanced again toward Mandall, whose somber gaze over the great vista before him was unchanged, and then drew myself gently up and over the open window's edge, and lowered myself silently inside.

Standing motionless for a moment with pounding heart, I then took a silent step forward. Another—another—another—it was but a dozen steps that separated me from Holm, yet each one seemed infinite in length as I stepped silently across the room toward him. I stole a glance toward Mandall as I moved on, but he had not turned, not moved, and now my hopes were running high as I stepped on, with my knife open in my hand. Holm was watching me come, his soul in his eyes, and then I was beside him, was stooping swiftly and with my blade was severing the bonds that held his wrists, was reaching then to sever those that held his ankles, reaching——

"Harley! Behind you!"

It was Holm's sharp cry beside me that made me whirl instantly around, and as I did so I had a momentary glimpse of Mandall's tall form towering over me, of the pistol in his hand

raised above my head. So sudden had been that warning cry, so swift and sudden had been Mandall's leap back inside toward me when he had turned to see me, that I had no chance to grasp him, to grapple with him. I could but fling up my arms in a vain attempt to halt the blow from the pistol that even then was descending upon me. For even as I made that vain endeavor to avoid it the blow crashed down upon my head, and then brilliant light seemed to burst from all things about me as I sank nervelessly downward into darkness!

PAIN-SHOT darkness, black torments of racking pain—it was through those that I struggled back to consciousness. I was aware first of the dull roar of the great shaft's gaseous currents, outside, and then of strange scuffling, smiting sounds that seemed to come from near me. Even then I was aware that it could have been but moments that I had lain in that unconsciousness, for my upflung arms had saved me from much of the force of the blow that had stunned me. Nearly dead from exhaustion as I was, though, after my wild climb up the mountainside, and half unconscious still from the crashing blow, it was only after moments of effort that I could open my eyes.

I was lying where I had fallen, where Holm had been, and now as I looked slowly about I saw through the open door Holm and Mandall, locked together in a death-struggle in the clearing outside! My blade had severed the bonds on Holm's wrists and though his ankles still were tied he was clinging with all the strength of mad despair to Mandall, who was struggling himself to shake him off; silently, except for the sound of their panting breathing and their scuffling over the ground in the clearing outside, with the last clear light of sunset upon them, with the great tree-monsters beyond them whipping their tendrils wildly about and straining to and fro! It was a struggle to the death, both men knew, a struggle upon which the doom of a world depended, and the eyes of both were deadly as they swayed to and fro, Holm clutching Mandall's pistol-wrist and the other striving madly to bring the weapon to bear on him.

I strove to lift myself from the floor, to reel out toward that struggling pair, but my stunned, exhausted body could not obey my will. I saw Mandall gradually beating down Holm's resistance, and I sobbed, writhed, and then with a supreme effort threw out my arms and dragged myself, only half conscious still, a little across the floor. A foot—another foot—foot by foot, inch by inch, I crept forward toward the door, toward that great black panel whose wires led down into the shaft outside. On — on — while now Mandall and Holm were reeling still across the clearing in mad battle, were reeling nearer to the great tree-monsters at the clearing's edge whose tendrils were straining toward them!

Now I was within a yard of the panel, was dragging myself forward with the last remnants of my strength toward it, toward the wires that depended from it, that led outward toward the shaft. And as I did so I saw Mandall, struggling there with Holm almost within reach of the great tree-monsters' tendrils, glance momentarily toward me and see me! As he glimpsed me there almost at the panel his eyes became mad, and with insane strength he thrust Holm down to the ground, was leaping with pistol in hand toward me!

In that moment I knew it for the end, knew that in a moment more both Holm and I would be dead and the last chance of halting the world's doom gone, knew that before ever I could reach to that panel, to those wires, Mandall would be upon me. But even as Mandall leaped I saw something else, something that made me cry out crazily myself. I saw

Holm, thrust to the ground by the other, spring upward with one last wild access of strength even as Mandall had leaped, saw him in spite of his bound ankles hurling himself in one swift motion upon Mandall and knocking him backward toward the clearing's edge, *knocking him backward toward the tree-monsters whose myriad tendrils were straining toward him!*

There was a wild scream from Mandall as those numberless tendrils whipped about him; I saw him hoisted swiftly upward by them, still other tendrils shooting out to tighten about him, and then he had been drawn downward and out of sight into the tendril-covered mass of the tree-monsters, his mad screams abruptly ceasing! I saw Holm half rise, half stagger back toward me, and then, with my own mind darkening once more and with the last of my strength vanishing from me I reached upward and forward with one last effort, gripped the wires that led down from the great black panel before me, and with a supreme summoning of my waning strength ripped them down and out from the panel, from which came a flash of light. Then I was aware that the roaring of the great shaft outside had abruptly ceased, that Holm was still reeling toward me, and then the darkness of unconsciousness overwhelmed me once more.

5

SUNSET was fading in the west again when Holm and I passed out of the concrete building, to pause outside its door. It had not been until that morning that I had awakened, and during the hours of that day Holm and I had wrecked completely the dread mechanisms upon the summit, had destroyed dynamos and panel and descended into the depths of the shaft to wreck the great projectors there. Now, as we passed out of the building into the unchanged glory of sunset, we stood silent for a time in the silence that seemed to lie over all the world, gazing about us.

Before us there drooped, brown and dead and withered, those great tree-monsters that Mandall's hand had loosed upon the world, and that had drawn Mandall himself to death. Brown and dead and withered they were, now, their tendrils hanging limp and motionless — dead and withered as all those plant-hordes that had formed, that had been forming over earth, we knew, must be; dead and withered as Mandall himself had foretold would be the case were the great shaft's uprush of gaseous compounds halted; dead and withered as any plant must die and wither when it has not roots to keep it living, and when the rush of gaseous compounds and elements that has freed it from the necessity of roots is halted.

Beyond those brown, dead, monstrous things, too, Holm and I could see far down and over the countryside in the sunset's light, fading now to twilight; could see, on the mountain's lower slopes far below, brown, motionless masses, brown and dead plant-masses, lying strewn about as they had perished, and we knew that over all earth the plant-masses that had formed and had been forming would be lying dead also; knew that already the terror that had descended upon the peoples of earth so inexplicably would have lifted, as inexplicably, to them, and that upward already would be rising the joyful clamor of a world reprieved at the very moment of death.

"Mandall's doom." It was Holm speaking, gazing out over that far reach of mountain and valley. "Mandall's doom—and surely the world passed almost beneath it."

But my own eyes were on the brown, dead monsters before us. "Mandall's doom—yes," I said.

We were silent again then, there in the deepening twilight, were walking

in silence through those withered tree-things to the summit's edge, were passing over that edge and down the slope, down toward the silent village far beneath, toward the world. The darkness of night was descending swiftly upon us, white points gleaming out here and there above us. Steadily, though, we moved onward, downward, down the slope of the great mountain whose summit rose darkly behind and above us, its great bulk looming black against the black sky's scattered stars.

A Song out of Midian

By ROBERT E. HOWARD

These will I give to you, Astair: an armlet of frozen gold,
Gods cut from the living rock, and carven gems in an amber crock,
And a purple woven Tyrian smock, and wine from a pirates' hold.

Kings shall kneel at your feet, Astair, emperors kiss your hand;
Captive girls for your joy shall dance, slim and straight as a striking lance,
Who tremble and bow at your mildest glance and kneel at your least command.

Galleys shall break the crimson seas seeking delights for you;
With silks and silvery fountain gleams I will weave a world that glows and seems
A shimmering mist of rainbow dreams, scarlet and white and blue.

Or is it glory you wish, Astair, the crash and the battle-flame?
The winds shall break on the warship's sail and Death ride free at my horse's tail,
Till all the tribes of the earth shall wail at the terror of your name.

I will break the thrones of the world, Astair, and fling them at your feet;
Flame and banners and doom shall fly, and my iron chariots rend the sky,
Whirlwind on whirlwind heaping high, death and a deadly sleet.

Why are you sad and still, Astair, counting my words as naught?
From slave to queen I have raised you high, and yet you stare with a weary eye,
And never the laugh has followed the sigh, since you from your land were brought.

Do you long for the lowing herds, Astair? For the desert's dawning white?
For the hawk-eyed tribesmen's coarse hard fare, and the brown firm limbs that are hard and bare,
And the eagle's rocks and the lion's lair, and the tents of the Israelite?

I have never chained your limbs, Astair; free as the winds that whirl
Go if you wish. The doors are wide, since less to you is an empire's pride
Than the open lands where the tribesmen ride, wooing the desert girl.

The Black Monarch

by Paul Ernst

"There occurred a miracle of death turning to life."

The Story Thus Far

IN HIS distant laboratory Professor Eden photographs, by means of a delicate instrument called the edograph, a hitherto unsuspected Evil Genius who rules the world from an underground palace in North Africa. The edograph is wrecked by Professor Eden in an insane rage communicated to him through a blue diamond left with him by a stranger sent by the Evil Genius. At his death Eden sends his adopted son, Professor Sanderson, on a crusade to destroy the Black Monarch. Sanderson finds that blue diamonds similar to his have brought destruction to others besides Professor Eden. He joins forces with Neal Emory, who possesses one of the blue stones, and whose father has been murdered by the machinations of the Black Monarch. They enter the Black Kingdom, narrowly escaping death from the weird electrical fishes when their boat overturns in the underground stream. They find a race of automatons ruled by the despot, Rez. The two crusaders are captured by the guards of Rez and brought to the room of the blue disk to hear his will.

10. The Room of the Disk

MOMENTS passed, and no sound or sign was given them that they were observed. Both felt that they were under surveillance, though the room seemed to be empty; but as they continued to be disregarded by the royal attention, they relaxed a little and began to examine curiously the room they were in.

A dark blue circle of crystal at one end of the chamber was the first thing

This story began in WEIRD TALES for February

to catch their wondering gaze. Huge and sullen it glittered there, like a dim moon.

"The disk!" exclaimed Sanderson. "It's what we saw in the pictures—the mysterious circle of light. We're in the very room Eden photographed in his laboratory thousands of miles away!"

He moved tentatively toward the great stone, paused an instant to see if his move should incur some demoniac outburst of anger; then, nothing happening, walked up to within a few feet of it. For a moment the scientist overwhelmed the man as he eagerly examined the huge, enigmatic-looking disk.

"The father of our rings!" he said to Neal. "Compare them." The two stones were identical in color and appearance.

"Here, then, we have one secret cleared away after a fashion. In some manner this is a power-transmitting unit that is able to govern the thoughts of the wearers of chips from it." He pointed to the uneven edge of the great disk. "And here's where the chips come from. God knows how many have been detached from here—perhaps the jewel was once twice as large. Thousands and thousands of its pieces scattered throughout the world to act as tiny receiving-sets and pick up the telepathic commands of Rez to the unsuspecting minds of their wearers! Thousands and thousands of men of authority who are as blindly the puppets of Rez as the automatons here in his own kingdom! Truly this being is king of the earth!"

"But—can that enormous thing actually be a diamond?" Neal marveled.

"There's no doubt of it," said Sanderson. "But the amazing thing, to me, is not its size, for that may be only a natural phenomenon. The unbelievable part is its shape, for that is artificial. Try to imagine what this diamond must have looked like in the rough—an enormous, irregular mass of solid crystal weighing thousands of pounds. And then, with that picture in your mind, try to conceive of a way of cutting out a disk seven or eight feet across — whatever the original diameter of the stone may have been —and hardly more than an inch thick!"

"It doesn't seem possible——" Neal began in answer.

And then he stopped abruptly as it was revealed to them that the master of this marvelous stone was listening to all they said, was within a few yards of them. For the tingling feel of evil in the air was thickened suddenly as though generated by some diabolic dynamo that had just been turned to double speed. There was a stir behind the curtains near the disk as if something had brushed against them for a moment. And a voice come to their ears.

It was an astounding voice, an impossible, unbelievable voice, to have been heard in that heart of all the world's wickedness. It was the sweet, soft contralto of a woman. Like a tropic sea, warm though single-toned, enchanting though almost deathly in its lack of inflection, it poured over them.

"You are right," said the glorious voice. "It is impossible. No jewel so large could be cut so thin. The explanation lies in the fact that the diamond is, as you would term it, synthetic. I manufactured it."

Wordlessly they stared at the disk, from behind which—or through which —the mellow-toned words were coming.

For a moment Neal forgot danger, surroundings, everything, as he listened to the voice. A flush of color came to his face, and his eyes widened helplessly as though, against all will and reason, he were being lulled to forgetfulness of purpose by the musical syllables that sounded in his ears. As the words went on he hardly

heard them for a time, lost in their mere sound.

"The jewels in your rings—one of which was so carelessly thrown into the ocean a short time ago—came from the disk as you guessed. Also, as you surmised, whoever wears one of them is my creature. Through the natural affinity of the similar pieces of crystal, and through the dominance of the larger fragment over the smaller, I am able to command utterly the persons who are in contact with them."

Hardly realizing what he was doing, Neal found himself moving closer to the curtain near the diamond. But at the end of the first step he was stopped abruptly, powerless to make a further move. It was as though he had been subjected to a sudden stroke of paralysis! He couldn't raise his arm or move his leg. He couldn't even turn his head. If the air about him had turned to concrete and solidified into a block with himself in the center, he could have been no more helpless.

"The history of the rings may interest you," the calm, dead voice continued. "I had them made for twin princes in India many centuries ago. For years these rulers obeyed my orders without knowing they were under my influence, and brought their provinces to quite a satisfactory state of poverty and ruin by continual warfare. Then, following a last instruction of mine, they prepared to make war on each other. But there was in their court a man almost as acute as your Professor Eden, who deduced that the rings were responsible for some of the disturbances then shattering the realm. He managed, when my attention was turned elsewhere, to give them to a visiting sheik to take back to Arabia with him. So India passed from under my control for a short time—a very short time! But Arabia was won in its place.

"From that day on, the two rings were worn by many men in authority, passing down finally to yourselves. The wearers of the rings have sometimes done strange things, actions they could not account for later. So the two diamonds have proved their worth to me many times over—and have performed this last service of bringing you two here as my guests."

"Guests!" rumbled Sanderson. He had recovered from the first shock of hearing the incongruously soft and beautiful voice, now accepting it as merely another of the obscure phenomena connected with the concealed being who was talking to them.

"But of course—guests," answered the voice. "I invited you, in my own informal way. I made your entrance easy. And now I am showing you my hospitality. Does that not define the term precisely?"

"I'm afraid I don't quite understand your reference to an invitation," said the professor coldly.

"No? Then I shall be pleased to show you what I mean—and incidentally reveal to you another power of my diamond disk that may divert you." Calm as the flow of time, the voice sounded from the depths of the stone; cold as the stone itself, but intimate as a whisper. "Behold—your invitation."

With a suddenness that made them gasp, the light was drained from the big, draped room. In the darkness they saw the disk show sullen and faintly luminous. Gradually its luminosity increased, and a picture appeared on its polished surface. The picture was that of Neal asleep in a small chamber that was obviously the stateroom of a ship.

Still too moved by the fascination of the voice to be more than faintly impressed by the marvel revealed to them, Neal saw himself stir uneasily in his sleep, and slowly raise himself to a sitting position as though in answer to a command. His eyes were wide open but unseeing, and his left hand raised itself until it was stretched rigidly forth as though groping for something just out of

reach. In the picture the blue diamond glittered faintly on his finger.

After an instant, moving with slow, deliberate precision, his pictured self got out of the bunk and walked toward the open port-hole, left hand extended first as though a cord were pulling at his wrist. Through the port-hole his hand and arm were thrust, and after them his head and shoulders. For an instant he was struggling to force his way through. Then the wide eyes blinked, light and consciousness returned to them, and he backed hastily away from the aperture with fear expressing itself in his face.

The picture wavered and the disk returned to its normal state.

"My first invitation," came the beautiful voice, soft in the darkness. "It was to make you receptive to the consequence of this, my second move."

Again the disk brightened and presented a picture; and Sanderson saw himself back on the deck of the steamer, tramping along beside the rail. He paused a moment, not far from another figure; and then suddenly began to struggle for his life as though a dozen men had materialized from thin air and were trying to push him over the deck's edge and into the ocean. The watching figure gazed, bewildered; and then the enigmatic struggle was over, and the professor's blue diamond whirled into the sea.

"In thinking I was attempting to remove you from my path by forcing you to commit suicide, you were mistaken. I merely wished you to excite the curiosity of your young friend, and also to bring you together by the natural astonishment you would share at the possession of duplicate rings. My experiment in psychology was successful. You joined forces, and you are here. My invitation was accepted."

"But, you said something about making our entrance easy," said the professor with a frown.

"Yes. It seemed that you needed help in your discovery of the gateway to my realm. I followed your search in my disk. When it appeared that you were too stupid to find a path into the kingdom of Rez, I caused a way to be opened for you by forcing a section of rock over the underground lake to collapse——"

"How could you do that?" demanded Sanderson quickly.

"By measured vibration," answered the voice. "As you know, every material has its own vibration point. By exposing any given substance to measured waves of vibration, and by synchronizing the outside waves with the intrinsic vibration timing of the substance, it may be disintegrated at will. There are, in a cavern near here, ninety small vibrating-machines, each one tuned to a pitch that corresponds to the vibration point in each single element—there are ninety elements, I have discovered. These machines can be combined in number and harmony to match the number of elements in any substance I want disintegrated, regardless of distance. By pressing a lever I set in motion an infinitesimal earthquake that can cause to fly to pieces whatever material I desire destroyed.

"It was by this process that the slide was caused that opened a path for you to my kingdom. I might also tell you that, after you were safely through, I tuned my vibrating-machines according to a chemical analysis of the rock heap above us which you know as Block Mountain, caused another and larger slide, and buried the exposed entrance again. This was not to avoid invasion, for of course the heap can be removed quite easily. It was merely to persuade any who might know of your departure that you are now dead. With that conviction there will be no desire on their part to pursue rescue courses that might embarrass me."

"You say that our separate at-

tempts at suicide on board ship were only deliberate efforts on your part to bring us into your power," observed Sanderson. "How about the hysteria you caused to seize Eden the first time he put on your ring? Was he also being invited?"

"That was a genuine effort to stop Professor Eden from his work of exposing me," answered the sweet, level voice. "Eventually, after he had smashed all of his records and all the traces of his work, I meant to force him to kill himself. Unfortunately I began by prompting him to ruin his edograph. That instrument was more precious to him than his own life, and even my will was not strong enough to compel him to destroy it. His repulsion to the idea of smashing it was so strong that it broke the thread of connection through my diamond for the moment, and he escaped his fate — the only time I have ever failed. Later, when I could have killed him easily, it occurred to me that—inasmuch as he was keeping his experiment a secret—he might do me the favor of providing a guest for my entertainment, and still work me no harm. My hope was justified. Through his efforts not one guest alone, but two, have considerately sought me out to present me with amusement and, a little later, to offer me a source of scientific instruction."

"How will you be amused by us?" asked Sanderson bitterly. "Have you some unique form of torture it will please you to watch us endure?"

"Not at all. You will merely give me the pleasure of your company for awhile—I am only sorry the time is to be so short—and thus serve to relieve the monotony of my existence. You see, I have had no guests but you for over eight centuries.

"At one time, over eight hundred years ago, it came to my attention that an Arab in the household of one of the more important sheiks was far ahead of his era in surgical knowledge. Needing his specialized service for myself, I had him presented with a blue diamond from the disk and led him to visit me here. He was a brilliant man. A year of my teaching enabled him to perform the operation I required. He is still with me, but his presence grows tiresome. Your arrival is most welcome."

"You say he came here eight hundred years ago!" Sanderson exclaimed.

"Yes."

"But in that event you are more than eight centuries old——"

"Much older," answered the golden voice. "The Pyramids were built in my youth."

There was a little silence during which the professor glanced about the room—at the Roman sarcophagus in the far corner, at the shields and javelins.

"If you were born so long ago," he said at last, "how is it that all visible traces of the outside world here, including your language, dates back to comparatively modern Roman times?"

"Because that is the time I formed my kingdom. At that time, comparatively modern as you say and previous to which I had lived alone, I came here and began to gather around me a small force of men. I recruited these with outlawed Roman legionaries, beginning with raids on neighboring towns and isolated villas near the hot baths. Later I shut my people up, started the task of hollowing this cavern system out of the rock, and began the government that eventually resulted in my present self-supporting, automatic kingdom."

"But, the antiquity of the Pyramids!" protested Sanderson. "For a human being to live so long . . . impossible!"

"It is not at all impossible. The secret of indefinitely prolonged life has been four times discovered and four times lost by the race of mankind. I contrived to learn it from a priest of Egypt when I was still a

young man, and have prolonged my life ever since. It will be as many more thousands of years before I finally die."

"And you are able to extend the life of others as well as your own life?"

"Yes. Did I not say that the Arab surgeon, who is known as Number Ten, has lived with me here for eight hundred years? Do not look so doubtful of my age. The proof is surely apparent—how could I, or any other, acquire in one ordinary lifetime the knowledge necessary to perform such advanced scientific miracles as you have seen in this room?"

"Granting that you are as old as you say," Sanderson replied with a deliberate sneer on his lips, "perhaps you will be kind enough to tell us how you have done it. What is the secret of your eternal life?"

"I have not said it was eternal—it is merely preserved. And I can not entirely explain to you for the reason that, with all your scientific knowledge, you would not be able to comprehend its intricacy. However, I can tell you that it has nothing to do with any so-called elixir, or any chemical preparation, as you and Professor Eden supposed. It is the natural product of a force no more marvelous nor unusual than electricity but at present unguessed by your own science. I can only inform you that it is induced by periodic exposure to certain properties in the rays of the sun which, when separated from other, neutralizing rays, preserve the cells of the body from deterioration. . . ."

"That must surely be a lie!" the professor interrupted, his manner one of calculated insult, as though he hoped to anger Rez into continuing his revelations. "The rays of the sun! What have you—hundreds of yards under the surface of the earth—to do with the rays of the sun?"

For a little time there was silence as though the powerful master of the disk had allowed the professor's badgering to annoy him. Then the voice flowed out as even and passionless as before.

"The sun," said the voice, "shines here more often than it does on earth. Indeed, the earth is a dark and gloomy place in comparison with my kingdom. For here the sun shines eternally, night and day!

"You are standing in clear sunlight at this moment, although you are hundreds of yards underground even as you say. The rays of these metal plates—that now illuminate this room—are the true rays of the sun. I will explain it to your somewhat limited intellects if I can.

"Long ago I found out that light rays are capable of penetrating all matter. The visible beams may be deflected, as from a mirrored surface; they may be filtered by any opaque substance and lose their visibility; but the true light rays go directly on in almost undiminished force. Thus when an object—the globe of the earth, for instance—is placed in the path of light rays, the luminosity of those rays, the quality that makes them visible, may be deflected or dissipated; but the light rays themselves continue on and on indefinitely in the form of invisible light—black light, if you please to describe it so. In this manner, day and night, the light of the sun is continually filtering entirely through the ball of earth and out into space beyond.

"There is no light without heat. For centuries the race of man, in attempting to generate light without heat, have been trying the impossible. They have been able to generate light that apparently has a smaller percentage of heat — but this lack of warmth is only apparent. The heat remains, in a form less perceptible to instruments and sensory organs, perhaps, but potentially as undiminished as ever. To illustrate what I mean, I

might cite the electric current as a good parallel.

"In an electrical current you may greatly decrease the voltage without altering the potential content of the current in the slightest, and you can redevelop the voltage at will by transformers: In light rays you may greatly decrease the heat content without altering its potential energy in the least—and you could redevelop the heat at will, if you only knew how. Why, in addition to receiving light from the stars, you on earth could have heat as well—yes, and electrical energy, too—if you only knew how to differentiate it from the light rays.

"Here, then, we have light—and heat as a natural corollary—continually piercing through and through the ball of earth. With potential heat and light from the sun at my command, no matter how far underground I might choose to live, it only remained for me to find a way of transforming it from its invisibility and its intangibility back to its original form of visibility and perceptible warmth. I found that way.

"There is a substance capable of transforming the invisible light rays to visibility. This is a metal—one that you have not yet discovered—which I have named rinay. With this rinay ore concentrated into metallic form, as I have devised with these plates, I catch the direct light and heat of the sun that continually penetrates this section of earth. So night and day I am lighted and warmed by the sun itself, retaining a far more even flow than you above, who allow yourselves to be deprived of some of it by every cloud that sails the wind."

SILENTLY the professor stared at the plates set into the ceiling that were focusing the rays of the sun through hundreds of yards of solid rock, and shedding them in even warmth and illumination over the chamber. Then he frowned at the disk.

"There is another thing that puzzles me, even in the midst of your explanation——" he began.

"Probably there are many things capable of puzzling you," interrupted the voice, its smooth lack of inflection contrasting strongly with the mockery of the words. "But what is it? I am honored that so great a scientist as yourself should come to me for instruction. I shall answer if possible."

"This has nothing to do with science," said the professor, stung by the taunt. "It is a personal bewilderment: You say that you are of ancient Egypt, and the rest of your subjects speak Latin. How is it that you know the modern language of English?"

"To read the thoughts of all men—as I must do if I would accomplish my great purpose—I must know all languages. Oh, yes," the voice flowed on in toneless mockery, "I have a life purpose, too, though I do not train my body to it daily as you did under the tutelage of Professor Eden. As if your body, though ten times as powerful, could overcome my mind!"

"And what is your life purpose?" inquired Sanderson, ignoring the mockery as calmly as he could.

"Perhaps I shall tell you that—perhaps not. If you are fated to be my guests for a sufficient length of time I may show you a real glimpse of the power that is mine now, and the more enormous power that is to be mine very soon. Meanwhile as my guests you will make yourselves at home in my poor kingdom. You may inquire freely about anything you wish to know or see——"

"I wish to see you!" interrupted the professor, staring at the concealing curtains behind the disk.

"That is impossible."

Sanderson clenched his great fists. "I'll make it possible, then! If you're behind that curtain——"

He sprang toward the disk. But before he could reach it, he was stopped. Around him, as around Neal, was abruptly set the intangible, immov-

able pressure—as though the air about him were concrete which had solidified into a block with himself constricted in the center of it.

"As you see," commented the exquisite voice, "it is—impossible."

"You devil!" panted Sanderson, struggling to free himself.

"Devil?" the sweet voice cut in on his words. "You have formed a curious conception of me as a being purely evil.

"What is evil? As nearly as it may be put into words, it is that which results in the greatest harm to the greatest number. You think my life is a perfect example of that, but you are wrong. My life is being used to attain the greatest *good* for the greatest number. Under my rule, contentment is the aim always in view.

"You have seen for yourselves how contented my subjects are. They are never sick; they are never hungry. They have not intellectual griefs, for they have no intellects to receive such things. There is no poverty nor spirit of rebellion. There is no spirit at all, in fact; and a man is always most contented when his spirit has been completely broken and he accepts the lowest as a promise that he can go no lower. With this in mind, you can see that I am a power for good and not for evil. You might even call me benevolent. . . ."

"Benevolent!" exclaimed Neal, tearing himself away from the thralldom of the glorious voice for an instant. "Benevolent——" His voice trailed off into silence as he inclined his head again to listen to the mellow syllables flowing from the diamond disk.

"Possibly you are thinking of your experience in my cave of the water snakes," crooned the voice. "I assure you this was a mistake. You were only put there through the stupidity of my lieutenant who first discovered you. He did not know you were a spy from the world above. You were merely caught in the web of my discipline: Your helmet was not worn at the precise angle, and you were otherwise non-conformant. The overseer therefore assumed you were a workman in need of suppression. At this instant he is balancing on the ledge you occupied, in punishment of his mistake."

"And you call that benevolence!" said Sanderson. "You mold your creatures into unthinking machines, and then punish them for lack of intelligence. If you ever allowed them to think for themselves——"

"They might think dangerous thoughts," was the smooth interruption. "No, the greatest good for the greatest number does not permit of intelligence. Humanity must be made stupid and mechanical, forced into animal discipline, for its own benefit."

"You're indeed generous to do the thinking of others for them!" commented Sanderson. "And when does your royal benevolence intend to have us executed?"

"You will not be executed at all," was the answer. "You are not to die—that is, not precisely."

"Not to die, precisely?" echoed the professor. "You speak in riddles. What do you mean by—not precisely?"

"You will soon discover for yourselves what the meaning is. For the moment I will only say that yours is a glorious destiny. You'll be used, as rats are used in an experimental laboratory, to help forward the day when all men are happy exactly as my men of Rez are now."

"But——"

"You will retire to your prison," said the soft voice. "I only repeat that it is not death you have to face. Merely a change from life—to existence!"

The guard leader appeared in the curtained doorway. The queer paralysis that held their bodies was relaxed. By the side of the leader they went down the stairs, Sanderson baffled in his puzzling inability to leap

behind the disk, and Neal walking in a dream spun by the clear, sweet voice.

11. Behind the Disk

IN THE rooms set apart for them as "guests" the professor paced restlessly back and forth. The fiasco he had dreaded had come to pass. In the presence of Rez, almost able to touch him, he had been held powerless by his inhuman will. It was certain that Rez had been behind the curtain that brushed the back of the disk less than three strides away—and he had been unable to take those three strides! Was this to be the end of his long struggle—to reach the very throne room of the Black King and there be fixed as helplessly as a fly in amber? He swung his big arms in savage impotence. In some manner he *must* overcome that trance-like spell cast over his muscles by his opponent!

On one of the metal benches Neal sat listless and preoccupied, brooding over the audience they had just concluded.

There in that underground hell he had paradoxically heard a heavenly voice. Reason told him that it came from the evil being who was the evil genius of the whole earth, and who was the indirect murderer of his father. Nevertheless, the spell of the glorious voice persisted. In memory he heard it again, purely feminine-seeming, as passionless as a perfect phonograph and yet giving the impression of having issued from a soft white throat.

"So Rez is a woman!" he exclaimed. "And with what a voice!"

"We don't know that," contradicted Sanderson, turning to frown at him. "The guard leader told me that 'Rez is surely a god who speaks with many voices.' The voice might belong to one of the women of the kingdom."

"That doesn't seem reasonable," Neal demurred.

"No, and it doesn't seem reasonable that we should be standing in clear sunlight here in this underground burrow, either. But we are. No doubt Rez had some reason to speak through the lips of a dead woman——"

"Dead woman!" echoed Neal, half rising to his feet.

"The voice carried a hint of death to me. Didn't it to you?"

Neal was silent a moment. Then, "Is that the voice you heard outside the door when you were first brought here?"

"I don't know. Oh, forget the voice, Neal! We have more important things to think about—how we can overcome the owner of it, for example." He resumed his restless pacing.

"Most of the power of Rez lies in his diamond disk. We know that it reconstructs pictures of any event, past or present; and it catches thought and reproduces it orally. We know, too, that it transmits metal commands from Rez to the minds of anyone close to a chip from its edge.

"In addition, and what is more to the point at the moment, it has hypnotic powers—like those of a crystal globe, only vastly exaggerated. With its aid Rez is able to control our subconscious minds utterly, and, through our minds, our bodies. We will be under his domination as long as he has the jewel to help him. That being the case our problem is clear: We must smash the disk."

"But we couldn't do that even if we were given the chance."

"Why not?" demanded the professor belligerently.

"Well, a diamond—the hardest of all stones——"

"It is also one of the most brittle," Sanderson pointed out. "And this disk is hardly more than an inch thick. A blow should crack it readily enough. Then, with its influence shattered, we could go behind the curtain and come to grips with Rez. . . ."

Neal listened with renewed interest. Behind the curtain! That was

where the voice had come from—the voice that he refused to link with Sanderson's description of the monstrous, cylindrical head.

"Then next time we go to the disk room, we'll break the thing and——" he commenced eagerly.

"You forget that we can't move a limb against the command of Rez," interrupted the professor irritably. "And he certainly won't allow us to break his diamond if he is anywhere near."

"But if he weren't there at the moment!" Neal's shoulders straightened at the thought. "If we could escape long enough to break it in his absence——"

Sanderson shook his head despondently. "I'm afraid that's impossible. Remember our thoughts are disclosed to Rez, if he wills it, the minute we think them. Right now he may be watching us in the disk, listening to all we say about escaping."

"But," said Neal, "you once remarked that in your opinion Rez can't be all-seeing, all-knowing. He can't turn his attention to our thoughts if he is already concentrating on some other part of Earth."

"That's true," murmured Sanderson thoughtfully. "But how can we escape from these rooms long enough to pay Rez an informal call?"

THE solid stone walls of their prison offered no solution to their problem, and the outer door, of heavy metal, was impregnable.

"It's got to be done through the guard," said Neal. "We could overpower the guard leader when he brings us food."

"There'd still be the rest of the guard," said the professor dubiously. "We can't overpower them, too."

"No, but we might force the guard leader to command them to go away. We've seen how blindly these puppets obey orders."

"We've also seen how the leaders are punished for disobeying the orders of Rez," countered Sanderson. "We couldn't make him do it."

Silence followed this unanswerable objection for a time. Then Neal turned to him thoughtfully.

"You know Latin," he said; "can you remember the way the guard leader worded his command to the men to file out ahead of us and line up on the ramp below the outer entrance?"

"I think so," answered the professor. "Why do you ask?"

"It occurs to me that if I took the helmet with the blue diamond in it, and repeated that order to the men, they might obey it as though the man himself had given the command!"

Sanderson stared. "But you don't look like the fellow in the least. It would never fool them, stupid as they are."

"I don't believe it's necessary to fool them with appearances. I think they'll obey any order given them by a person wearing the diamond of authority in his helmet. They're machines, as we know, and anyone ought to be able to start and stop them just as machinery starts and stops at the touch of a control lever—no matter whose hand it is that touches the lever!"

The professor considered the suggestion.

"Yes," he agreed slowly, "I believe there's a lot in that idea. Anyway it's worth a try."

"We'll do it tonight," declared Neal.

"Tonight? There is no night in this place!"

"I forgot," said Neal, glancing up at the ceiling plates. "Well, the next time our friend comes with the food, then."

Sanderson agreed, and he repeated the Latin phrase of command as nearly as he could remember the wording of it. Neal rehearsed it carefully, trying to deliver it in the even, machine-like tones adopted by the lieutenants of Rez. After that, as they had lost

track of the time and did not know just when their next meal would be brought in to them, they took their stations as planned.

Sanderson stood flat against the wall beside the door so that when it swung open it would hide him! Neal seated himself in plain sight at the metal table where their food was always placed for them; and they waited till the officially helmeted puppet should make his appearance.

Nearly half an hour must have passed before they heard the drawing of bolts that heralded the bringing of their meal. The professor tensed his body to spring. Neal assumed a relaxed and casual position on his bench.

The door was opened slowly and the lieutenant appeared with the platter of food. As he stepped into the room, before he had closed the door behind him, Neal caught a glimpse of the usual guard of a score or so of men in a double row across the entrance to take the place of bolts and locks for a few moments.

Woodenly insensitive to the supposition that the prisoners might be so mad as to entertain a thought of escape, the man walked stolidly toward the table at which Neal was seated. Behind him the giant professor crept up noiselessly, his feet moving furtively over the muffling carpet. Just as the guard leader turned to leave, Sanderson got close enough to reach him.

A big hand clamped down over the guard's mouth. A muscular leg was tightened around his legs to throw him to the floor, and an arm circled his arms and held them helpless against his sides.

Instantly, as had been planned, Neal took off his tunic and ripped the tough material into lengths. With these strips he bound the man's hands and feet; and with a further wad of it he stopped his lips. It was all over in one violent moment, but short as was the interval required to tie and gag him, Neal had time to marvel at his actions. He did not struggle furiously to loose himself from his bonds. He didn't stare up at them with fear and hatred in his eyes. There wasn't an expression on his face. Even in such a crisis, he remained an automaton!

Neal set the helmet with the diamond on his own head, took the captive's tunic, and exchanged his own gray metal sandals for the yellow metal ones on the other's feet. Then he approached the portal. Once more he repeated the phrase of command to make sure he had it perfectly, after which he opened the door and faced the score of automatons ranged outside.

An instant he paused and looked at them. Certainly they seemed mechanical enough for anyone to start and stop even as he had said. Soulless, mindless, twenty identical parts of one inhuman system, all that manipulated them was a set of orders like different wires jerked to produce different results in the actions of dolls.

SILENT and wooden, they stared at him as he stood in the doorway; and if a change in leaders was noted, at least there was no recognition of the fact evidenced by any one of their number.

He repeated the sonorous words of command; and docilely the men turned, preceded them down the hall as before, filed out onto the ramp, and lined up on the slope below the door. So far the way was clear to the disk room.

On the roof of the lower building, they hesitated for a moment before entering the tower.

"If there's another leader in the guardroom at the bottom of the steps——" Neal whispered.

"If there is, we shall probably be stopped," the professor rumbled. "But we won't look for trouble until it forces itself upon us."

Coolly they traversed the open

stretch of roof, turned into the arched portal—and found that the way was still open to them. No lieutenant of Rez was to be seen in the large square chamber that occupied the foot of the tower. Only the puppet guards were stationed there as before; and, as before, there was no notice given them. Without hindrance they walked rapidly to the foot of the broad steps leading up to the disk room. As on the previous occasion, the score of guards accompanying them remained behind, leaving Neal and the professor to proceed alone to the den of Rez. The mere sight of the helmet that Neal had taken from their leader and put on his own head, had been their password throughout.

"If these men are so completely without self-volition," whispered Neal as they turned the first bend in the stairway and passed out of sight, "I can't see that they're very useful as guards. Why have them stationed in the building at all?"

"Perhaps they are put there with only one order given them—to stop any large band of their own kind that might seek to rush the tower," said Sanderson. "That would ward off all chance of revolt, though that chance is almost nil, it would seem. However, in any event we are past them. We've got this far on our errand."

"It's been almost too easy! Do you suppose we're walking into some kind of a trap? Is Rez waiting for us with some unexpected and unpleasant welcome?"

Sanderson shrugged. "We'll have to go on and see for ourselves."

Rapidly they climbed the remainder of the stairs and came to the curtained door of the disk room. Pressing close to this they listened intently for a few moments. No sound came to their ears from the other side; and they ventured to lift a corner of the drape and gaze into the chamber. They could see no sign of Rez, nor, more hopeful still, could they sense the presence of the Black King. The repulsive feel of evil in the air was there as ever, but it was dim and faint as though it were but an echo of that disturbing personality left behind while its author was absent on other business.

Reassured, they stepped quickly into the room, to destroy the disk of Rez if they could, or to endure the unpleasant reception that might have been prepared for them if they were not alone as they appeared to be.

As BEFORE when they had visited it, the apartment seemed empty and lifeless. The bright sunlight pouring down from the metal plates revealed no sign of Rez's presence; and not a sound could be heard from the direction of the big diamond. The disk itself was blank in the glare of illumination.

"I think we're alone," said Neal, pitching his voice almost to a whisper, forgetting the fact that no matter how inaudible he talked his words would have been audible to Rez had he been there—that even thought was known to that alert being if he so willed it.

The professor nodded impatiently and walked straight toward the disk. There was in his mind only space for the one thought: instant accomplishment of the object of their escape.

His eyes searched the room for some hard tool to smash against the thin diamond plate. The javelins that hung in patterns on the draped walls offered themselves, but he rejected the idea of using these, and decided that one of the heavy metal benches would be more effective.

Catching up a bench, he walked toward the diamond. But just as he had swung it back and was about to crash it into the center of the brittle stone, Neal caught his arm.

"Wait a minute," he suggested. "First perhaps we ought to see if we can make it work for us."

"First," said Sanderson, staring incredulously at his companion and then making an irritable move to free

his arm, "first we'll break the thing, and then we can do our talking!"

"But we might be able to learn from it what we want to know—the way of escape from this place. Then, after we have——"

"Damn the escape!" snapped the professor. "All I want is the destruction of Rez, and that I can never hope to accomplish unless I break the disk before he returns."

"It would only take a minute——"

"That might be just a minute too long!"

"If we hear Rez coming you can carry out your purpose and smash the bench against it before he gets here."

It was an unconvincing argument to the professor. Hear Rez coming! And would not Rez be warned of their presence in his telepathic way long before he entered the room? And having thus been warned——

However, he set the bench down reluctantly in its place before the disk and tried to conceal an expression of disappointment at his friend's sudden cautionary desire to preserve his life first and think of the purpose of their mission last.

"What have you in mind?" he asked, grasping for patience in the face of Neal's inexplicable wish for delay.

"Just this—let's see if we can't call a picture to the disk as Rez did, showing us a way out of the kingdom. There must be a secret exit somewhere. When we have learned about it, we can break the stone as we planned."

"Personally," said Sanderson, an edge to his tone, "I would rather smash it at once and let the question of escape take care of itself! But I suppose I haven't the right to dispose of your life so autocratically. All right, we'll try it."

He stood close to the disk, facing it and studying it speculatively.

"I haven't an idea how this may be controlled. Probably by sheer force of thought."

Increasingly conscious of the flying seconds, he proceeded on that theory and turned his whole mind to the task of willing a picture to take form on the polished surface that would show them what they wished to know. With all his power he concentrated on the round blue stone.

It remained sullenly blank.

"Perhaps there is some sort of mechanism in the rear—behind the curtain," suggested Neal. "I'll go and see." Eagerly he went forward. The voice had come from behind that curtain. . . .

"Neal! We're wasting invaluable time!"

"Just a minute longer." He stepped to the drapes in back of the disk.

For a second or two he paused there, on the threshold of the inner sanctuary of Rez.

In here were probably the answers to many of the secrets of that ruler. What strange things might not lie behind this curtain! Would Rez himself be revealed to him, sitting in silent wrath on some exotic throne and preparing to deal terribly with the intruder from the upper world? Was death waiting in the form of some mechanical trap that would be released by the pressure of the first foot to step into the forbidden room?

His hesitation lasted only an instant. Resolutely he drew aside the curtain and stepped behind the disk. . . .

"Good God!" came his voice, muffled by the drapes. "Sanderson!"

Startled by his tone, Sanderson ran to join him.

As THE professor left the larger room in front of the disk, there was a slight stir of movement in one of the far corners. From there, where the massive stone sarcophagus squatted against the wall, could be heard a faint grating sound—and the heavy lid of the ancient coffin was raised slightly as though some living thing

were under it and about to step forth into the room. An almost tangible aura of repulsive magnetism, a kind of odor of evil, escaped from the sarcophagus as the great lid slowly opened.

With an exclamation the professor stared at the spectacle that had so moved his friend. Then, instinctively, he inclined his head and kept a hushed silence.

Before them, laid out on a narrow, black-draped slab, was the body of a girl. She was dressed in the all-enveloping garment that Sanderson had seen in the cave of the women; but the regular cowl had not been drawn over her head, and her face, fully revealed, was different from the faces of any of those. It was beautiful and firmly molded, with a promise that, in life, its owner had been no automaton to respond to every whisper of autocratic authority. This was no standardized subject of the kingdom of Rez!

"Is it possible that—this is Rez?" murmured Neal at last. Sanderson shook his head, and they continued to stare, wondering, at the rigid figure.

By some marvelous method of preservation it had been made to appear as though she were only sleeping there. The smooth ivory of the cheeks was natural-seeming and life-like. The closed eyes were only slightly sunken, and looked as though at any moment the long-lashed lids might tremble and open. There was a slight cleft in her chin, hardly more than a dimple, and the velvet recession in the smooth white skin was singularly appealing. Her hair was vividly dark in the light of the plates. The Queen of the Nile herself could not have looked more softly beautiful.

Her right hand was extended toward the back of the disk, resting on a low metal stand and brushing against the curtain that hung only an inch or so from the great jewel. On the middle finger of that hand was a ring, and in the ring was set a blue diamond that had been chipped from the edge of the disk. Thus the diamond on her finger was almost touching the back of the parent gem; that the arrangement was deliberate and to serve some purpose was shown by the careful placing of the black-draped metal stand, on which her fingers showed white as ivory in a black velvet jewel box.

This, then, was the mechanism used in conjunction with the sullen blue crystal! This was the owner of the voice—of the liquid contralto that was beautiful in spite of its lifelessness, fascinating though flattened to monotone!

"She's lovely!" breathed Neal, and at the words, the professor turned quickly to look at him.

There was in his eyes an emotion of which he himself was not quite aware. His lips were parted as he gazed at the pallid features. On his face was an expression that told plainly enough what was in his heart. Ever since he had first heard the voice he had been fighting within himself, his instinct telling him that the voice was a thing of sweetness, reason insisting that it could not be anything but repulsive in spite of its charm. Now he knew his instinct had been right, and the joy the knowledge gave him was printed on his face.

"Lovely!" he said again. His hands reached out impulsively to touch her, but Sanderson recalled him to the urgency of their task.

"The disk," he said impatiently. "We can't delay any longer——"

But his reminder came too late.

Even as he spoke, there was a subtle change in the atmosphere around them. The air was charged with an evil magnetism that made their flesh creep. As though someone had shouted a warning to them, they knew they were no longer alone in the little room behind the disk. Somebody — some Thing—had drawn the curtains, entered noiselessly, and was standing behind them!

Whirling around from the body of the girl, they saw a monstrous, human-seeming figure. Still and menacing it stood, just inside the entrance. For an instant they hesitated, appalled. Then they sprang at it together, but in that moment they felt themselves seized with the blinding spell that made them powerless to lift a hand. They could only stand, paralyzed, and stare.

12. Rez

OUTLINED all too clearly against the rough white of the drapes, the human Devil they sought—the powerful author of most of the world's great catastrophes — watched their struggles to free themselves of the invisible chains that held them motionless.

Here at last was the Rez of the photographs, the gigantic figure at whose tiny apparition Eden had shuddered when he first pictured it in the diamond years before.

He was larger even than Sanderson, and even more enormously muscled. But there the slight resemblance ended. He had not the vital, alive appearance of the professor. Rather, he seemed like a dead thing brought to life, a creature of stone or of some unfleshlike substance that was only shaped to look human. And on his skin there was no spiky black hair. It was blanched and dry-looking, so smooth that it glistened faintly with a scaly, serpentine sheen as though, if there ever had been hair on its surface, it had long ago lost its vitality and had disappeared. In that one feature, his skin, was proof of the claim of his enormous age—it resembled unbelievably old parchment, perfectly preserved but breathing of centuries past.

The eye, however, was most held by the head of Rez—or rather, by the head's covering.

The pictures taken in Eden's distant laboratory had faithfully showed the smooth cylinder, tapering to a rounded point like a projectile, that was set between the creature's shoulders. They had not been clear enough, though, to indicate that the cylinder was not a head but an exaggerated helmet.

It was a seamless casing of smooth, dull metal, a pointed shell about a foot through and two feet high. At the shoulders it was curved to fit the arc of the collar bone in an immovable arrangement that made it necessary for Rez to turn his whole body if an object were to be seen at either side. In the front of the shell were two small round panes of glass, ground into heavy lenses. Behind these peered ice-gray eyes, magnified to grotesque proportions by the lenses that covered them.

Just under the metal hood, at the base of the heavy throat, there was a large hole sunk deeply into the flesh and covered by fine mesh screen.

Utterly helpless, Neal and the professor waited for the blasting wrath of the monster they had uncovered. And as they stood speechlessly there, a voice came to them. They could not tell whether it had its source in the cylindrical metal hood or in the diamond disk just beyond the curtain. Toneless it was, and unplaceable, seeming to come from the air about them.

"Now you have seen," the words were somehow conveyed to them, "is your dangerous curiosity satisfied?"

They said nothing. There was no answer they could make. They had come to accomplish the destruction of the disk, had delayed too long, and now stood completely in Rez's power. They could only await his pleasure.

Their nightmare captor stood aside and gestured for them to leave the chamber behind the disk and go into the other room. They found their legs released momentarily from the binding spell, and obeyed the unspoken command. So close to the repulsive figure did they pass that they

could have touched it—had they only been able to move their arms!

In the center of the big room they were halted. Rez followed slowly and sat down on the bench the professor had seized a few moments before in his determination to break the disk. He faced them, his cold eyes hideously distorted by the heavy lenses.

"You are prying guests," came the voiceless words—words that seemed to form within their own minds without having been uttered by human lips. "But guests you still remain and I must, of course, be courteous. Why did you come here?"

Neither answered. Sanderson was numb with anger at himself for not seizing the opportunity he thought had been given him of breaking the diamond disk. Neal was straining to free himself and close with the creature that had caused the death of the lovely being behind the curtain.

"You came to smash the disk, didn't you?" the unspoken words went on. "You thought to rob me of the source of my power. I knew you were coming, but I did not bother to stop you. It was not necessary—not so long as you"—the metal hood nodded toward Neal—"wore the blue diamond ring on your finger. Wearing that, you were under the dominance of the disk and could not allow it to be destroyed."

"The ring! Of course!" exclaimed the professor bitterly. "That was why you wanted to delay me in breaking the disk. I thought at the time it was a suddenly developed timidity—your arguments about first finding a way of escape. But it was the infernal stone on your finger!"

"Exactly," came agreement from the metal hood of Rez. "Consciously he was as anxious to shatter the diamond as you. But subconsciously he was incapable of allowing it—though it would not have been allowed in any event as I was nearer than you may have thought. Hence his arguments that caused you to vary from your plan. I am informed that your efforts to use the stone were useless, too, that you were unable to learn from it what you wished to know."

The enormous eyes were turned toward Sanderson.

"It is surprizing that a scientist of your ability should not be able to ascertain the secret of my poor powers. But perhaps your failure lay mainly in the fact that you tried to call a picture to the disk while the light was shining on it. The diamond must be in darkness. But even if you had known of that necessity, it might have baffled you to proceed—it is not for everyone to turn on and off the illumination from my rinay plates. It is rather more complicated than turning an electric switch. However, I will show you the secret even of this, and also reveal to you the way of escape you wanted to discover."

WITHOUT moving a muscle, Rez sat before them. And suddenly, of its own accord it seemed, the light faded from the room like water drained from a bottomless container. The disk took on its resemblance to a circle of darkly blue night sky; and this in turn brightened, then shaded into a picture.

On the face of the diamond showed the great central cave in which was the building that now housed them. The picture moved, as might a picture taken with a cinema camera from the front of a moving vehicle. Away from the central tower building it sped, toward one of the wide tunnels that branched away like the spokes of a wheel. Above this tunnel was one of the great, painted monsters that sprawled over the misty red walls of the cavern in a nightmare mural decoration, and its tail pointed down toward the peaked arch of the passage. So much Sanderson noted; but whether the symbol had been placed there by accident, or whether it was design that had laid that mural route

decoration there, he could not determine.

Down this tunnel their eyes were whirled, almost as though they were performing the journey in person, till at the second turn left the main tunnel was deserted, and their path led down a smaller passage. Here, after a very short way, it seemed to end in a blind wall, but, protruding from the rock near this seeming end of the tunnel, was a lever of gray metal. As they watched, this was depressed by some unseen power and the wall that had barred further progress was drawn up into the roof of the arch. On they went in their visual journey; and now the passage was an unsmoothed, natural grotto, widening into ragged caves and dwindling again into dimensions such that a man could hardly squeeze his body through.

Once more the way seemed hopelessly barred as the passage terminated in a small cavern, sheer-walled, and apparently with no other exit than the opening that led into it. In this cave were a dozen or more of the puppets of Rez stiffly on guard.

Opposite the entrance a slotted block of stone could be seen, and in this were two levers. One was of gray metal, as had been the lever that had raised the preceding barrier. The other was of yellow metal.

"The yellow lever," came the message of Rez, "starts in motion the process of measured vibration I described as having caused the rock slide that showed you the underground lake. If it is touched"—there was a significant pause—"if it is touched—I will only say that any army that might have been sent against me, and that might have won entrance into my underground kindgom, would cease to exist. I would have complete vengeance in my downfall."

The picture flowed on in its taunting illustration of the way of escape they would never now be able to utilize. The gray metal lever was pulled down, and a section of the rock wall of the cave swung up into the roof to disclose a narrow crevice at the end of which could be seen the light of sky and a tracery of leaves as though the small opening there were concealed by a bush or low tree.

"The crevice seems small," came the mocking message of Rez, "but it is of soft earth, easily dug away until room could be made to crawl out to safety. However"—the chill eyes glared at them from behind the distorting lenses—"you will never traverse that path in person. As I have said, you are not going to die, precisely—but your condition will be such that, in a very short time now, you won't be thinking of escape, or of anything else."

The picture faded from the disk, and the light flared out again to reveal the huge figure of Rez as immobile as before. Whatever the means he used of controlling his illuminating-plates and his picture-transmitting diamond, they were not physical.

"And now," came the contemptuous words, "you will of course be able to use the disk and control the rinay plates at will. You have seen just how they are manipulated. . . ."

They could only stare, helplessly, at the metal cylinder that enveloped all of their captor's head but his glaring eyes.

"You are wondering at the protective helmet I wear?" resumed Rez. "Can you not," he looked at Sanderson, "understand exactly what it is, and why it is rendered necessary? The reason is surely apparent."

Sanderson shook his head, still so overwhelmed with a conviction of defeat that he only half comprehended the words.

"But think," urged Rez smoothly. "I have told you I was born in Egypt thousands of years ago. What would be the natural effect of all the intervening centuries on a brain—and its encasing skull?"

Still the professor kept silent.

"My respect for your ability as a reasoning scientist is in danger of growing less," mocked the indefinable voice. "But I will tell you—inasmuch as the account has some slight connection with the fate reserved for yourself." The great body rose, and Rez began to walk slowly up and down the room in front of them, a form of restless activity they were soon to learn was habitual with him.

"It is the theory of your physiologists," he began, his words coming to them with equal clarity whether he faced them or not, was at a distance from them or right beside them, "that increasing brain capacity is accommodated by ever-deepening and ever-increasing folds in the surface of the brain itself. In this way, they say, a larger and larger surface area may be confined in a given space, just as a square foot of cloth may be crumpled into a small sphere. This is nature's method of allowing the reasoning cerebral matter to expand at need in spite of the rigidly limited bone casing of the skull.

"It is the further theory of your physiologists that such increase of convolution in the surface of the brain is endless—that the skull would never be overcrowded no matter what age and intellectual capacity the mind might attain. In support of their theory they point to instances of long life on earth where in spite of many decades of growth the skull continues to hold its brain with ease.

"But, in citing this as proof of their statements, they have overlooked two things: The fact that the average man declines again in brain power as he approaches great age; and the possibility that a man might live far beyond the limit of their imaginings.

"In existing through the ages—for more centuries than most men number years—I have broken a law of nature and upset your limited theories of skull capacity. And there was a time about eight hundred years ago when I thought I must pay the penalty with death or loss of reason.

"During all the centuries I have lived, it has been my main purpose in life to assimilate all the knowledge of the world's great minds. Where there was a chemical experiment, an engineering problem, a psychological test of far-reaching result, there I have trained my disk and sat invisible in attendance. All this knowledge I stored in my brain, until there was in my head such a library of advanced information as no building has ever contained in printed pages and numbered volumes. And here was reached the limit of mental growth in relation to skull construction, the point where my brain began to be too large for my skull.

"Gradually there commenced a series of awful, tearing aches as the expanding cerebral matter crowded the confines of its inelastic casing. My eyes were pushed almost out of their sockets by the pressure within; and there were long periods of temporary blindness during which I could only lie relaxed in this room, hardly daring to think for fear the infinitesimal resultant pressure would kill me instantly. The bones of my skull separated until there was almost a finger's width between them. My skin had lost its resiliency over the great period of my age, and was stretched to the utmost to cover the widening cracks. Once that skin should split and leave the brain entirely exposed——

"It was just at this point that I found help through the service of the disk. An obscure Arab surgeon, a skull specialist a thousand years ahead of his time, performed a marvelous operation on the spear-fractured skull of his sheik. I watched it in the diamond and knew the solution of my problem was found.

"To the man went one of the hundreds of emissaries that do my bidding in the outer world. He

presented the surgeon with a blue diamond, and from that moment, of course, the man was mine. Through a hidden entrance, which I have since caused to be blocked off, he came to me under the domination of the jewel.

"At first he refused to consider attempting the operation I described. . . ." There was a pause. "But after I had demonstrated to him the penalty for disobedience in my kingdom, using one of the guards for an example, he consented quickly enough. A year of training under my tutelage—a year in which every day might be my last—and he was ready to perform the service I required.

"A metal casing, the one you see now on my shoulders, was prepared for me. The inside was burnished to velvet smoothness, and eyeholes were cut into it which were protected with lenses of glass set into the metal in airtight grooves. The bottom of the shell was curved to fit my shoulders, and there was an expanding rim made for it that was capable of adjustment while still remaining airtight. All was ready for the operation, including the surgeon—in whose presence I gave orders to my men as to what should happen to him if he failed.

"We went to the laboratory—which presently you also shall see in somewhat similar circumstances—and I put myself under his hands, blind and almost insane with pain. He performed the operation as I had taught him:

"The top of my skull was removed like a cover lifted from a pot, from just over the eye-sockets in front to a little above the base of the neck in the rear. Vitality was sustained during this delicate surgery by rays from the rinay plates—another fact you are shortly to learn about at first hand.

"In place of a skull the metal casing was set over the exposed brain, which was now released of its fatal constriction. The expanding band was tightened around my neck, the metal being sunk in until a roll of flesh covered its rim completely. The operation was complete, and I was equipped with a skull that would not condemn me to death no matter how long I might live."

Back and forth he walked before them, the artificial skull turning awkwardly as he moved.

But how in the world can he breathe? marveled Neal to himself.

"Air is admitted to my lungs through this hole in my throat," came the direct answer, as though he had spoken his thought aloud. A huge finger pointed to the circle of fine mesh screening set deep into the heavy throat. And now that he had called attention to it, they could faintly hear a hissing sound, inhalations and exhalations timed to the movement of his great chest.

"What with the rapid expansion following the releasing operation, and the continued growth of eight more centuries of mental labor, I do not myself know how much of this metal skull is at present filled by my brain. But it is enough"—the words swelled in volume—"it is enough to make me emperor of all the human race!

"I am master of minds, ruler of the world of thought and hence of the world of men. No intellect can withstand me. No will can resist the power of my own. I am the supreme mental force! And you—childish creatures of a childish earth—thought to come here and destroy me! You, more helpless in my grip than animals—for animals haven't minds to dominate—invade my kingdom and seek to kill me!"

The grotesque metal skull was turned toward Sanderson again. "Your ridiculous lifelong training is useless here, as I think you can now perceive for yourself. Dismiss your thought of struggling against me, and resign yourself to the fate that awaits you."

The cold eyes glared through their lenses at Neal. "And you would do well to rid yourself of your infat-

uation for the inanimate thing that lies behind the disk. It is not well to be infatuated with death—it comes to some quickly enough!"

He paused and stood enormous before them.

"You will be escorted back to your chambers. And you will not again have the opportunity of leaving them unless I give the command."

NEAL took the ring from his finger and stared at the indigo diamond that glowed in the heavy setting.

"And this," he said bitterly, "was the reason for our delay in smashing the disk! Even while I was arguing with you and causing us to waste valuable seconds, I could hardly understand myself. And all the time Rez was merely amusing himself by tantalizing us! What a poor thing you must have thought I was—to put the chance of escape against the chance of breaking the infernal power of Rez!"

"I'll confess I was surprized at your sudden caution," said the professor slowly. "I should have known it was the ring speaking, and not you. I should have gone ahead and acted regardless of your arguments. But the chance has passed now."

"I'd get rid of this thing at once, only I don't know how to dispose of it. Shut in here——"

"It doesn't matter," replied Sanderson absently. "Whether you wear it or not, your thoughts will be repeated at will inside that incredible metal skull." He shook his head thoughtfully. "Who would believe that a human being could live through such an operation?"

"That isn't as astounding to me," said Neal, "as his ability to live now that it is performed! He's told us how he breathes, but—how does he eat? Has he managed to eliminate the necessity of taking food into his system like other mortals?"

"No doubt he feeds himself by injection. It could be done easily enough, some concentrated nutritive substance shot directly into the blood with a hypodermic arrangement. Such a problem would offer few difficulties to one who must be the greatest chemist that has ever lived."

"But he spoke to us," Neal continued bewilderedly. "How could he do that with his lips in a hermetically sealed shell, and air admitted into his windpipe below the vocal cords?"

"He didn't actually speak, if you'll remember," Sanderson pointed out. "It was as I described the greeting I got when I first came into these rooms —a voice seemed to speak, and yet it was impossible to define that voice or describe it in any way. The answer is, of course, that it wasn't a voice at all. It was an advanced form of telepathy. The vibrations of thought clothed in coherent speech were transmitted from his brain to ours, probably magnified into audibility somehow by the diamond, as an infinitesimal noise may be made audible by the magnifying power of an amplifier. The words reacted on our inner, mental ears and the effect was that of actual hearing —though the physical outer ear wasn't functioning for a moment. It's easy to see that, with his marvelous powers, Rez isn't discommoded by his cumbersome metal head!"

"No," agreed Neal with a frown, "in fact it's probably the other way around — the chances are that the metal shell is as protective as a helmet."

However, the professor shook his head at this.

"I don't think so. Metal is a far less effective insulator from shocks and sudden jolts than bone. If a blow were struck against the casing it might instantly numb the brain just underneath it. But I don't see how we'll ever have a chance to test that theory now. In the disk room the instant either of us conceives the thought of attacking him, that instant he can read it and command our bodies to immobility by the power of

his will magnified by the hypnotic properties of the disk. It is as he boasted. Rez is master of minds. Master of minds. . . ."

For a moment he apparently let his thoughts wander along some pathway thrown open by the words.

"It's really nothing but hypnotism. There should be some way of escaping it. Animals can't be hypnotized, for instance. Not in that way. Mindless things. Doubtless the workmen here, the guards, are too low in the scale to be so controlled. In making his subjects too beast-like to revolt, he may have made them too mindless to be controlled as he controls his lieutenants or us. If we could coerce one of the men to break the disk—train him as one trains a dog. . . . No, that's impossible. But if either of us could compel the other to absolute mindlessness for a few moments the mental dominance of Rez might be broken. An advanced mesmerist might. Neither of us is capable of doing it. . . ."

His voice trailed off into silence. In the unvarying glare of the rinay plates they sat, fretting with the realization that they could do nothing but wait helplessly for their disposal at the hands of the hooded devil in the disk room.

The constant glare of illumination was distracting in its bright monotony. Never for an instant did the eye have an opportunity to rest from the piercing yellow beams. Even behind closed lids the glare persisted, throbbing against the optic nerves as the continued beat of a drum might rasp at the delicate nerves of the ear. Only when there is no night is there a chance to realize fully what a tremendous boon night brings us with its change in shading and its restful darkness. Mental concentration, even physical repose seemed impossible in the irritating persistence of the warm yellow rays.

Neal moved restlessly. "What do you suppose is to be done with us? Rez keeps referring to some vague fate in store for us, although he insists we are not to die."

Sanderson spread his big hands in an impotent gesture.

"We probably won't know until he chooses to tell us. It seems to divert him to keep our suspense up in this cheap way."

For a time there was silence as they became engrossed in their thoughts; Sanderson in fruitless attempts to plan a way of smashing the disk, and Neal in haunting memory of the golden voice that had come to them from the diamond and the beautiful, tragic figure that lay on the black-shrouded slab.

He tried to imagine what she had been like in life. That she might be one of the women of the black underground kingdom he refused to believe for a moment. She was far too different from the automatic creatures that lived their dull lives in Rez. She had been brought from the outside world, surely, at some time or other—perhaps several centuries ago. And Rez, the unspeakable despot who called himself "benevolent," had cut her down at the start of her life and had placed her there for his own mysterious reasons. . . .

"Why do you suppose he did it?" he suddenly asked aloud.

"Did what?" demanded the professor, not being endowed with a Rez-like ability to read minds.

"Put the dead girl beside the diamond disk?" explained Neal.

"Well, we know that she serves the double purpose of transmitting his own thoughts verbally if he desires, and of catching and speaking aloud distant thought-messages from the disk. And it might be that only a woman's body, as the most delicate of human organisms, can serve the fragile mechanical purpose of catching and transforming human thought into speech. It's only a guess."

"So he killed that harmless, beau-

tiful thing to make a new part for his machinery!"

Sanderson smiled dryly. "As I say, it's only a guess. And I can imagine that a being as old in iniquity as Rez would have more use for new mechanical parts than for harmless, beautiful things. But in any event it's a crime that looms small indeed in comparison with the vastly greater evils that may be laid to his account. In the millions of lives he has cost, the life of one individual is not very important."

But Neal, in his heart, disagreed. Only the scientific mind is able to weigh tragedy impartially. To most of humanity the death of some personally important one totally eclipses a catastrophe on the other side of the world in which thousands die. The collapse of our own dreams is more poignantly felt than the earthquake in another land.

In the very beginning he had joined the professor not so much because he was stirred by the tremendous abstract evil of the Thing they now knew as Rez, but because he hoped he might take some sort of revenge for the death of his father. Now he burned with a greater desire to smash that nightmare cylindrical head, not because of the unbelievable degradation he had seen in the underground kingdom, not because a whole race of people had been made into soulless machines, but because one girl—whose beautiful still face and low sweet voice he could not drive from his mind—had been caught among the countless other victims of this being who ruled the world, this unsuspected monarch of all the nations.

"Is there nothing at all we can do?" he exclaimed savagely.

"Nothing," said Sanderson moodily, "unless we can smash the disk. And I don't see how we can do that when Rez, through its power, utterly dominates our minds."

Neal clenched his hands as he saw again the still, rigid form behind the curtain, and heard again the taunting words of Rez—not to become infatuated with death.

ABOVE them in the tower, in the curtained chamber behind the disk, the monstrous form of Rez moved ponderously about a task that would have been more surprizing to Neal, could he have seen it, than any other single happening of the realm.

A drape was pushed aside by the big, hairless hand to reveal a row of stone shelves on which were various containers and calibrating-vessels. There were many objects in addition, coils of thin metal tubing, small concave plates of the rinay metal for generating heat, fabric and alloy articles whose purpose could not be guessed by any other than the evil brain that had designed them. Out of all the objects, however, Rez selected only three containers filled with various liquids, and a calibrated measuring-glass.

At the side of one of the containers he fixed a concave rinay plate, and focused it on a ruled sliding stand. When he had it set to his satisfaction, he paused. Instantly, as though an electric switch had been thrown, the plate glowed sun-yellow and emitted a heat that set the liquid to bubbling in the container within a few seconds.

Raising another container, one with a greenish fluid in it, he tilted it into the calibrated glass until the bottom was barely covered. The third container was drained of an equal content—which resembled blood but was a lighter crimson. The mixture glowed violet, seethed for a moment till it had entirely blended, and subsided into a deep purple. To this was added a small portion of the heated fluid, the result of the mixture of the three ingredients being about a gill of warm amethyst liquid.

From another of the shelves he took a large hypodermic syringe, into which he fixed a needle after testing

it to assure himself of its proper sharpness. This was held in front of the rinay plate an instant for sterilization; then it was thrust into the calibrated glass and filled with the liquid there.

He turned, hypodermic syringe held expertly in his great fingers, and approached the white figure that lay on the low couch with its pallid right hand extended toward the disk. For a moment the cold, distorted eyes stared through the lenses at the blanched face and pale coral of the lips. Then Rez touched the white garment that draped the body, and laid bare the shoulder. In the smooth satin of the skin could be seen a faint blue patch, dotted in places with marks of the needle. In the center of this patch the big hand stabbed the hypodermic with delicate precision. The plunger was depressed, and the warm amethyst liquid was sent into the rigid body.

For a moment there was no reaction; and then there seemed to occur a miracle of death turning to life.

A barely perceptible stain of color came into the cheeks. The closed eyelids quivered slightly, and opened so that a glimpse could be caught of the whites of the eyes underneath. A faint tremor ran through the whole body; and when Rez held a polished sheet of metal before the trembling lips, a hint of moisture showed on the bright surface to indicate respiration.

The cylindrical head nodded once, as though to show satisfaction; and slowly the signs of life in the white shrouded figure faded into complete immobility again. The features were as pallid, the body as rigid and seemingly set in death as before.

For a few moments longer the cold eyes glared at her through the thick glass lenses. Then Rez turned once more to the still warm liquid in the measuring-glass, refilled the hypodermic, and sent the concentrated food essence into his own body.

This done, he went out to the larger chamber in front of the disk. The lights were extinguished and a picture formed on the big diamond—a picture of the prison rooms below, where Sanderson and Neal were moving aimlessly about. As each talked, their words came from the disk—reproduced in the lifeless, flowing contralto as the thought waves were caught by the huge jewel, transmitted through the diamond on the girl's finger, and reformed into audible sounds by the soft white throat.

The story rises in interest as next month's chapters reveal the hideous fate Rez has in store for Neal and the professor

SILVER BULLETS

BY JEREMY ELLIS

"The beast lifted a blood-stained muzzle."

I FIRST saw the house when I was returning from a duck-hunting trip along the edges of the marsh that adjoins Finger Lake. The birds had been both scarce and wary, and early in the afternoon I gathered my decoys, whistled my dog to the car and started for home.

When motoring alone I have always preferred the solitude of the narrow dirt roads to the busy rush of the paved highways and frequently turn into any unfamiliar lane that seems to lead in the general direction in which I wish to go. On this particular occasion I had chosen a picturesque, wooded road, but after a mile or two of bumping over stony projections and ruts, I decided that its scenic values were not sufficient to offset the damage I was doing to my car and tires. I had about determined that I would turn back and seek the main road again when I rounded a bend and came in sight of an abandoned farmhouse.

Almost every rural community has one or more of these neglected ruins, and most of them at some time or another acquire the reputation of being haunted. There need be no dark deeds connected with the history of the place; no strange sounds, heard by the belated passer-by; no lights, that flicker on and off behind closed shutters. The bare fact that people do not live in a house leads to speculation, to surmise and to rumor. It becomes known, usually quite unjustly, as The Haunted House.

I had seen dozens of "haunted" houses in my meanderings about the countryside, and had smiled at the weird tales that were told about them, knowing that in almost every instance the absence of a tenant was due to untillable soil and poor crops.

The house before which I now

found myself was typical; an old frame structure, that had once been white, standing well back from the road in the midst of a wood-choked garden and backed by a rock-strewn, sloping field that would have discouraged any thrifty farmer. Faded green shutters covered the windows, or hung askew on rusty hinges, exposing the shattered glass behind them. The chimney had long since fallen and lay, a straggling pile of bricks, upon the moss-covered roof. Weather-worn outbuildings and a rusted hay-rake, half buried in the weeds, completed the scene of desolation.

Nosing the car through an opening in the fence, where a gate might once have been, I was about to back and turn when my dog, a mongrel setter of unusual courage and intelligence, rose in the back seat and whined. He stood bolt-upright, looking intently toward the house, his tail down and a ridge of hair bristling upward along his spine.

"What do you see, Tug?" I said.

I had often heard the assertion that dogs are able to see things—ghosts, spectors and what-not—that are invisible to the eyes of humans, but I didn't believe it. Having good eyes myself, I have always felt that I could see whatever there was to be seen. I was right in this instance at least, for as I turned toward the house I became aware of what I at first took to be a dog, standing in the shadows beside the building. As I looked the creature moved a little and I saw that it was not a dog but a timber-wolf, a great, gaunt animal with baleful yellow eyes and open red mouth. It was twice as large as Tug and I didn't blame the dog for whining. I have hunted wolves in Canada and have seen some pretty big fellows but nothing to compare with the beast that glowered at me from around the corner of the house. However, it was not the size of the animal that surprized me so much as the fact that it was there at all.

There haven't been any wolves in our part of the country within the memory of the oldest settler; yet here I sat looking at one that was big enough to pull down a yearling steer. Wherever it came from, it was clearly up to me to destroy it, if possible, and I reached into the back of the car for the rifle which I always carry with me in addition to my bird-gun. Tug whined again and I whispered to him to be silent as I assured myself that the gun was ready to fire and raised it to my shoulder.

The distance was not over forty yards and I am rated a good shot, but my target was not the sort of beast that one cares to only wound; so I aimed long and carefully between the sinister yellow eyes, fully expecting to end the business with a single shot. To my amazement, the wolf did not so much as move its head at the crack of the rifle.

Convinced that there had been a defective cartridge in the barrel, I fired again and this time I saw the path of the bullet as it tore through a clump of weeds, behind the head of the animal, but again it stood motionless. Then, as I threw a third load into the breech, it turned and leisurely trotted out of sight around the corner of the house.

I was out of the car in an instant, too angry at my bad shooting to take account of the probable danger of meeting the beast at close quarters. Tug followed me, scared but game, and we turned the corner of the house within a few seconds of the disappearance of the wolf. There was nothing, living, in sight, and except for the house itself, no possible place of concealment. The barren field lay directly to the rear and there was no sign of life upon any part of it. On I went around the house, in the belief that the beast was ahead of me.

Tug whimpered at my heels, refusing to take the lead, and thus we made a complete circuit and reached the back door again.

Then I made a discovery. The ground was hard, behind the house, too hard even to allow weeds to thrive, and stooping to examine it, I found the faint but unmistakable tracks of the wolf. They led straight to the rotting wooden steps at the rear door and went no farther. Apparently the strange animal I followed had made its lair within the house and had intelligence enough to nose open a door, that swung to of its own weight.

With my rifle balanced on my hip, ready for a quick shot, I went up the steps and shoved a knee against the door, gently at first and then more firmly. It was no use—the door was bolted on the inside. Tug threw back his head and howled dismally, and for the first time I was scared.

Up to that moment I had been hunting a wolf—a wolf that was much larger than it should have been and in a part of the country where no wolves were supposed to be, but none the less a wolf, that looked like other wolves and left a track in the dirt when it moved. Even the fact that it had opened a closed door had not greatly surprized me—but when I found that door to be locked, the situation became a bit uncanny, even for the confirmed skeptic of things supernatural.

I made no further effort to open the door but went down the steps and again examined the wolf-track, hoping to convince myself that the track did not lead to the door; but the evidence was too plain to be mistaken. The marks of the big pads went directly to the foot of the steps and went no farther. Satisfied that I was dealing with something more sinister than a beast of the woods, I returned to the car, more hurriedly than I care to confess. I tried to argue with myself that, the door being locked, there was nothing further for me to do, but the argument was not convincing. I knew that both the door and the lock were in the last stages of decay and that, with very little effort, I could have forced an entrance. It was not the locked door, but the thing that lay beyond it, that had caused my precipitate retreat.

BEFORE I reached the main road, part of my courage had returned and I was determined not to quit the neighborhood until I had made some sort of an investigation of the old house. I turned the car toward the village of Merton, where my friend Johnny Buell combines a real-estate and farmland business with a small law practise. Johnny knows everyone in that section of the country and would be likely to have information concerning the place I had just visited.

I found him in his office, reading a letter that seemed to puzzle and annoy him, for he looked up with a scowl when I entered. As soon as he recognized me, however, he pushed the letter aside and greeted me warmly. Johnny is a good deal of a hunter himself, and after a short discussion of my poor luck at Finger Lake, I said casually:

"How would you like to try for a wolf?"

He looked at me with a rather startled expression and then glanced down at the letter which he had been reading when I came in. "How did you happen to say that?" he asked. "Have you seen a wolf?"

"A big one," I answered, and then told him about my experience at the farm and asked him if he knew the place. He nodded and listened to my story without interruption, except for a grunt when I said I had missed twice at forty yards. "Maybe there is something wrong with my gun," I said, "or, if you like,

I'll admit it was rotten shooting—but what about that locked door?"

He picked up the letter from his desk and handed it to me.

"That's from the fellow that owned the place," he said. "He's been living in Europe for some years—since about the time the war started."

The letter was written in a sprawling, masculine hand and was dated from Warsaw, Poland:

Mr. Buell, Sir:

I have read your letter about my farm being sold for taxes. I don't care who gets it, only you should try to see that my brother don't get it. My brother is no good. When Poland has a war he does not go home to fight—but he persuades me I should go because he thinks I will be killed and he will get my farm. Tell my brother he should not try to get my farm. If he does I will come back and stop him.

Yours Truly
THADDEUS RAVSKI

P. S. If you should see any wolves around my place, don't hurt them. They don't do no harm.

I tossed the letter back on the desk and for a few moments neither of us said anything. Then Johnny broke the silence:

"Lomba Ravski—that's the brother, bought the farm at the sheriff's sale last week. He's over at the county-seat today, getting his papers."

"What sort of a chap is he?" I asked.

"Queer," Johnny replied; "both of them are, for that matter. Thaddeus is the elder and inherited the farm from his father, as is customary in the old country. I imagine there was some sort of understanding that Lomba was to be taken care of—but they had a row about the time the war started. Thaddeus turned his brother off the place and shortly afterward announced that he was going home to fight for his country and went off to Poland. For a time he sent money to me to pay his taxes but he had let them lapse, of late years, and last week they sold him out."

"And the brother," I asked, "where's he been all this time?"

"I don't know. Lomba left here right after the row and hasn't been heard of since, until a few weeks ago when he turned up and got a job in Philbin's garage. When the sale came on, he was the only bidder. I don't think he wants the place, except to spite his brother." He paused, and after a moment added:

"I suppose I ought to get hold of him and warn him, before he goes out there to take possession."

"Warn him of what?" I asked.

Johnny didn't answer, and after a little I continued: "Lomba owns the place, apparently. Paid his money for it. You can hardly go to the man and warn him off his own property, unless you give him some good reason, such as—shall we say a were-wolf?"

"Oh, bosh!" he exclaimed angrily, "you probably saw a stray dog and——"

"But the letter suggests that there might be a wolf," I interrupted.

Johnny picked up the letter and studied it for a moment, then:

"All right, admit the wolf—but not the 'were' part of it. Look here," he went on, before I could speak, "this letter was posted in Warsaw three weeks ago. Thaddeus might have started for America at the same time and got here as soon as the letter—or maybe a boat ahead of it. He is determined that his brother shan't have the farm and he's hiding out there to frighten him off."

"And the wolf?" I said.

"A tame one," Johnny answered promptly, "that he brought over with him. You've admitted that you have never seen one so large on this continent. Well—there you are. He brings the beast over with him to scare Lomba. When he sees you driving into the place he lets the wolf out of the house. The beast is so big that you get buck-fever and

pump a couple of shots into the hillside. Then, when it runs for cover, he lets it back into the house and locks the door." He leaned back in his chair and glared at me, almost defiantly. "Anyhow," he added with a nervous laugh, "that's my story and I'm going to stick to it."

It was quite evident that Johnny Buell was arguing to convince himself, as well as me.

"All right, I'll stick to it with you," I answered, "but just the same we shouldn't let Lomba go out there alone. In spite of your 'buck-fever' diagnosis, I'm just curious enough to go with him and see what happens."

"I'll go, too," Johnny answered. "Lomba is coming in here for his keys the first thing in the morning. We'll tell him what we know and offer ourselves as a bodyguard."

WE WERE waiting in the office, the following morning, when Lomba Ravski arrived. He was a short, heavily built Slav with black hair and eyes and a swarthy complexion. He was dressed as though for a holiday in an obviously new and badly fitting suit of clothes, a gaudy shirt and colorful neck scarf. The acquisition of his brother's farm was an occasion to which he had long looked forward. He had a swaggering air of bravado that I thought a little forced when he demanded, rather than asked for his keys.

"I go to get my farm," he asserted defiantly, as Johnny took the keys from his desk and handed them to him. "You lawyers have kept me off my farm long enough."

Johnny Buell smiled tolerantly and started to explain that he had nothing to do with the withholding of the property. "Until the tax sale, the title to the farm was vested in your brother and——"

"Yeah," Lomba broke in, "and my brother still try to keep me off—but I'm ready for him."

He started for the door but Johnny stopped him.

"Just a minute, Ravski. I've a letter here from your brother, that I think you ought to read before you go out there."

He handed Lomba the letter and we both watched his face with interest as he read. It had no effect, other than to increase his anger. He tossed it upon the desk with a gesture of contempt, repeating his former assertion: "I'm ready for him."

"You saw what he said about a wolf?" I asked, entering the conversation for the first time.

"Wolf!" he echoed scornfully; "that is no wolf. It is the *volkodlák*."

"The what?"

"*Volkodlák*—the—what you call, witch-wolf. It is that damn fool Thaddeus, making himself into a wolf." He made the statement in a matter-of-fact manner, as though he spoke of his brother dressing for a masquerade party.

Johnny and I exchanged a glance in which each of us tried, unsuccessfully, to look skeptical. In the face of Lomba's assertion, Johnny's attempt at a logical explanation of my adventure was not convincing. It never had been, so far as I was concerned, but Johnny Buell was unwilling to give it up without a struggle.

"Look here, Ravski," he said, "the doctrine of lycanthropy was exploded, 'way back in the Seventeenth Century. Nowadays, no one but a madman believes that human beings can metamorphose themselves into——"

"I don't know them words you use," Lomba interrupted, "but I do know my brother can make himself a wolf. He learn it from my grandmother. That is what the fight was about, that time he throws me off the farm. And he don't go home to fight for his country neither. He goes to Warsaw because there is there a guild—what you call?—a lodge of

the *volkodláks*. Now he comes to drive me off my farm, but I fix him for that."

With a flourish he suddenly produced a big, nickel-plated revolver, patted it fondly with his hand and returned it to his pocket. He again started for the door and once more Johnny Buell stopped him.

"That gun," Johnny said, "won't help much if there is a—if things are as you say they are, out at the farm. This gentleman," indicating me with a nod of his head, "fired two shots at a wolf on your place, yesterday afternoon. He missed both times, and," Johnny added impressively, "he's the best shot I know."

Lomba shrugged his heavy shoulders and looked at me with a smile of contempt.

"Good shooting," he said, "don't count against a witch-wolf. It is what you got in the gun that counts. My bullets," he slapped the pocket which contained the revolver, "are of silver. I make them last night, over at the garage."

Silver bullets—that, then, was the explanation of his confidence. Silver bullets, I remembered, were the only effective ammunition against witches and demons, according to the seers and metaphysicians of the Middle Ages. But I shuddered to think of anyone facing the animal I had seen, with that big, cheap revolver, no matter what it was loaded with.

"Better take us with you," I said, and for a moment he seemed to be considering the proposition. I think the idea of going out to that lonely farm by himself was not entirely to his liking, although it was evident that he did not lack courage. But after an instant of hesitation, he shook his head.

"I go alone," he said. "It is between Thaddeus and me, this thing."

I thought perhaps he was not quite so confident as he had been, but he put his hand upon the pocket where the gun reposed and the feel of it seemed to restore his nerve. He threw back his shoulders and with a curt nod to each of us swaggered out of the room. We heard him thump heavily down the stairs and a minute later we heard a car start and drive away along the street.

After a little while, I said: "What do we do now?"

"Follow him," Johnny answered, getting to his feet. "Wait till I get a gun."

"And a silver bullet?" I asked, with an attempt at facetiousness which Johnny didn't take well.

"Don't be a damn fool," he answered, and went into an inner room where his hunting-equiment was kept. I had my rifle in the car and we were on the road within five minutes after Lomba Ravski had left us.

HALF an hour later I parked the car beside the road, a short distance from the farm, and Johnny and I went forward on foot, stepping cautiously and with our rifles ready for instant use. I don't think either of us had a very clear idea of what we expected to do when we arrived. We felt, of course, that Lomba had gone into some sort of danger, the exact nature of which it was difficult to define, and we thought he should have assistance, whether he wanted it or not. But I think that a much stronger reason for our being there was the unquenchable curiosity that is aroused, even in the most hardened skeptic, by actual contact with some manifestation of the supernatural.

We stopped at the bend of the road, and taking cover behind some bushes, looked toward the house. Lomba's car, a small semi-truck that he had borrowed from his employer, stood hub-deep in the weeds of the front yard. Except for this, the place seemed as silent and deserted as when I saw it on the previous afternoon, and I was about to advance when my companion made me a sign

to be silent. From the direction of the house there came a sound—the dull echoing of footsteps on the uncarpeted floor of an empty room.

"He seems to be making a tour of inspection," Johnny whispered, and as he spoke the shutter of an upper window was flung open and Lomba looked out. From where we crouched, behind the bushes, we could see him plainly—his face troubled and watchful and one hand in the pocket where he carried the gun. After a little he turned back into the room and we heard his heavy steps dying away toward the rear of the house. We looked at each other, and Johnny grinned, a bit sheepishly.

"Guess we are on a fool's errand," he said. "Everything seems to be all right and we must look rather silly, snooping about a man's dooryard, armed with rifles—*Look out! Here it comes!*"

It came from the opposite side of the road, the same swift, silent monster that I had seen the day before. We had barely time to leap aside when it went by, without a glance at us, passing so close to me that I felt its hot breath upon my hand.

"Good God!" Johnny Buell cried, but it was more a prayer than an oath. Then, recovering himself, he swung his rifle up, but there was no time for a shot. In the moment that we had stood, paralyzed with fear, the wolf had crossed the front yard like a great gray shadow and disappeared around a corner of the house.

Johnny went after it on the run, and scared as I was, I had to follow. Ten feet from the house we pulled up short as the voice of Lomba came to us in a shout, high-pitched and hysterical. First there was a sputtering of Polish or Russian words that we could make nothing of, then:

"Thad! Keep back, I tell you. The place is mine—you gotta get out of here or—keep back——"

The words were drowned in an angry snarl, like that of a dog, followed instantly by the dull, thudding report of a revolver. I bounded up the step with Johnny close behind me, and together we threw ourselves against the door. The lock held, and as we drew back for a second shove there came from within a most awful scream of agony and terror and the sound of a heavy fall. Then the door gave way before us and we plunged into the room.

Lomba Ravski lay upon his back in the middle of the dust-grimed floor, and astride of him, its great nose buried in his throat, stood the wolf. No sound came from the man, but one hand clutched feebly at the pistol, which had fallen to the floor beside him. As we staggered through the doorway, the beast lifted a blood-stained muzzle and looked at us. I was frozen in my tracks by the evil glow of the yellow eyes, but Johnny Buell jumped by me and, as the animal showed its fangs in a wicked snarl, shoved his rifle barrel against its ear and fired. The crack of the rifle echoed through the empty house, but the yellow eyes continued to stare balefully at Johnny for an instant and then turned upon the dying man on the floor. Twice more Johnny fired and then, with a terrified cry, dropped the rifle and staggered back toward the wall, covering his eyes with his hands.

Then I saw the weakly clutching fingers of Lomba reach and close upon the butt of the revolver. Slowly and painfully he lifted it, until the barrel pointed at the shaggy belly of the wolf. Slowly his forefinger curled itself about the trigger. There was a jarring report, which seemed to shake the old house to its foundations, and the wolf leaped backward with a startled, whimpering cry that was strangely human. Blood spurting from a gaping wound in its stomach, it stood swaying upon its legs and looking about the room with an expression in its eyes that I can only

think of as one of surprize. Then, with a repetition of that oddly human whimper, it turned and trotted through a door at the back of the room. We heard the click of its claws as it mounted a stairway and passed along a hallway above—then silence.

LOMBA was quite dead when we reached his side, his hand clutching the revolver in a vise-like grip. I took off my coat and laid it over his face, and then we both stood listening and looking up toward the ceiling, where we heard the last pattering of the feet of the wolf. Neither of us spoke and we did not look toward the thing on the floor beneath my coat. It may have been ten minutes that we stood thus, and there was no sound from above. Finally, as though actuated by the same thought, we turned toward the door at the rear of the room.

The trail of blood led us through a dark hallway and up a flight of rickety stairs to the door of a room at the front of the house, the same from which Lomba had looked a short time before. I hesitated at the closed door but Johnny Buell pushed it open—then stopped with a gasp of amazement.

What we saw was, not the beast whose bloody track we had followed—but a man. He lay in a corner upon his side with his hands clasped over his stomach and blood oozing through between the fingers. His light brown eyes were open wide and had in them the same expression of startled surprize that I had seen in the eyes of the wolf. He wore rough clothing of a foreign cut, and I did not need Johnny Buell's words to tell me who it was.

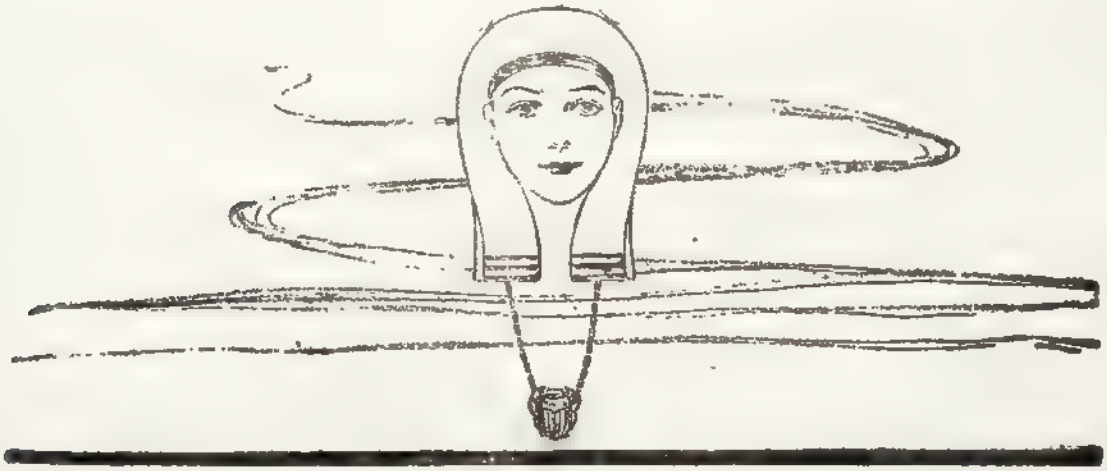
"Thaddeus Ravski," Johnny said in a whisper, looking about the room as though he still expected to find the wolf there. "Is he dead?" he added, his eyes coming back to the body on the floor.

I nodded. The jaw of Thaddeus Ravski was set rigidly and the blood had ceased to flow between his fingers.

"When they die, the werewolves," I told Johnny, "they resume human form."

We left the house hurriedly, using the rear door to avoid passing through the room where Lomba lay. Johnny agreed to wait outside the house while I went into town for the sheriff.

"And drive like hell," he said as I climbed into the car; "I can't stand it much longer."



SUZANNE

by J. JOSEPH-RENAUD

"The arms of the plant seized him in their embrace."

IN A spacious hall, lit by tall lamps, sat a young man in evening dress, bound in an armchair. Around him stood a woman and three men. The young man's downy mustache seemed extremely dark in his spectral face; his gaze was fixed and mournful. The ends of his white tie hung loosely down; mud was drying on his disordered hair, on his torn white waistcoat, on his black trousers.

"Mr. Wilson, once more we tender you our humble apologies! But we are acting in the service of our country, and we must have the text of this new secret military entente between England and France. A general drew it up, a minister signed it, and an attaché of the embassy—you—copied it! The general and the minister are both beyond our reach, so we are obliged to have recourse to the attaché! . . . Don't look so angrily at poor Milly—she too is serving her country! Yesterday evening in her little house you had hoped to find her—and you found us, and we were daring enough to ask you to divulge a state secret. You said: 'No!' So, we were obliged to bring you here in a motor car, bound down to one of the seats, enveloped in a great fur cloak, and gagged under a

chauffeur's mask. It was impossible for the passers-by to guess that this strangely motionless chauffeur was longing to call out 'Help!' " said one of the men in military tones, although his long gray hair and gold-rimmed spectacles gave him more the appearance of a German university professor than of a soldier.

"These cords are torturing me," panted the prisoner.

His eyes wandered back to the beautiful red-haired woman, who, closely wrapped up in a mantle, was passionately listening.

"Loose him," said the man with the gold-rimmed spectacles.

The other two, who were of herculean build, and evidently only subalterns, obeyed the order. But the prisoner was very weak; the floor seemed to be rocking under his feet. He fell over in a faint. . . .

When he regained consciousness he was again sitting in the armchair.

"Well? No need of cords now! A low diet, the open air, hunger, fatigue —no one can withstand these. And, if necessary, we have something better than that. . . . But you have only to speak, it is so simple! Give us the outlines of this clause, and you are free. Your involuntary complicity will be a guarantee to us for your silence, and when you return home you will receive a liberal compensation."

The young man answered: "You shall know nothing!"

Stars were still dancing before his eyes, and the humming in his ears had not ceased, while blood was dropping from his wounded wrists.

"Since you are obstinate, my dear fellow, we shall be obliged to make you acquainted with Suzanne—a very charming person! But first permit me to introduce myself. . . . Dr. Salzmann! . . . These gentlemen are my friends and collaborators. Now come!"

His tone had suddenly become honeyed—ironical—terrifying.

The two big assistants supported the dragging steps of the prisoner, but the red-haired woman remained behind.

She turned away her eyes as the captive passed her.

In a corner was the head of a winding iron staircase, which they descended in the dark. A heavy iron door opened before them, and a puff of warm air, smelling of eucalyptus, blew upon them. Fine gravel crunched under their feet with a hollow sound, as though they were in some enormous empty building. Far away, somewhere in the silence, a fountain was splashing.

The strange doctor turned on the electric light, and suddenly an enormous conservatory was revealed around them, so vast that its real size could not be gaged; for the small electric lamps, cleverly hidden among the green branches, shed but a feeble glimmering light, and nothing could be seen but foliage stretching far into the distance on all sides. Above, colossal leaves clustered gracefully on unseen branches, in dome-like groups, while, above these, others were dimly seen, and yet others. All around, above, everywhere, there was but a fantastic tangle, which it was difficult to believe belonged to the vegetable kingdom. Was there not life in these orchids, which looked full of an impotent rage? And in these green spiders, three feet high, crouching as though to spring? A confusion of terrifying creatures seemed to inhabit this warm forest, among the shadows and the glimmering lights.

No sound from outside—neither the sea flowing over the pebbles nor yet the moaning of the wind—penetrated here, but one could almost *hear* the intense life of all these exotic plants, so crudely green in the pale electric light.

The doctor evidently had lavished both wealth and care on this marvelous garden. Several times he stopped the group to mention, with ironical courtesy, the name of some rare plant

to the captive who was panting in the heavy, suffocating air.

THE end of the conservatory was in darkness, but it was just possible to see that it had recently been altered to form a rotunda, similar to the monkey houses in zoological gardens but with stronger trellis-work and with some enormous iron bars to further strengthen it.

A terrible apprehension aroused the young diplomat from the torpor into which he had fallen. And he suddenly noticed a sweet, sickly odor, somewhat resembling that of over-ripe bananas, lilies, or decaying dahlias, mixed with the smell of wild beasts! . . . One would have supposed a menagerie was near. . . .

The doctor, turning to him, said, in the peculiar, pedantic tones he had adopted: "Now, my charming young friend, allow me to introduce you to Suzanne!"

He turned on an enormous electric light hung from the roof of the rotunda. In the dazzling white glare there arose a sort of gigantic tree; *its leafless boughs were waving slowly, like mighty serpents, or like the tentacles of an octopus.*

The trunk, which could be seen between the movements of the horrible limbs, resembled green marble; at the base it was as thick as a man's body, and increased in girth till, at a height of twelve or thirteen feet from the ground, it branched out into a hundred long, hairy boughs, all slowly moving as though alive. At the end of each bough, thick as an athlete's arm, was a sort of flexible funnel which evidently possessed the power of laying hold of objects and clinging to them so that there was no escape. The shortest of these boughs were seven or eight yards long.

These monstrous tentacles were not waving at random, but *with conscious design* they were reaching out toward the grating! Some stretched far enough to seize and twist wires as thick as a cigarette.

"Ah, if the grating were not there! We must enlarge this cage; Suzanne is growing too fast," said the doctor, with a mirthless grin.

No one laughed. Although they must have seen it many times before, this horrible plant clearly terrified the doctor's assistants.

Wilson felt as though needles were pricking him all over. Although he was suffocating in this foul atmosphere, his teeth were chattering.

The doctor continued: "My charming young friend, I see you are a little surprized! But as you are filled with a thirst for knowledge, I will tell you about Suzanne.

"You must have heard of the South American plant call *Nepenthes* which feeds on insects? When a mosquito rests on one of its twigs, the tip seizes it and all the other twigs coil around it, and it is absorbed by the plant, which, while its digestion is going on, appears to be dead. I brought one back here from Brazil. Japanese gardeners succeed in dwarfing oaks and pine-trees till they are only a yard high; well, I experimented in a contrary direction with my *Nepenthes*. I tried to cultivate this little shrub, hardly as big as a rose-bush, till it should be as tall as a forest tree. I noticed in Brazil that a *Nepenthes* near an ant-hill, being thus better fed, acquires extraordinary dimensions.

"I began by stuffing it with flies, and it soon became more vigorous. Then I offered it bigger and bigger insects, such as wasps, spiders, bees, and on this diet it grew ten inches in a few months. Then, gradually, tiny pieces of meat took the place of the insects; Suzanne's growth now became extraordinary and her height and strength were soon trebled.

"I continued increasing the size of her meals; soon she needed a steak every day; then two. One day a sparrow perched on her and in a few seconds it had disappeared among the

greedy, ferocious branches; thenceforth Suzanne showed a strong predilection for living prey.

"For a year I fed her on mice, then guinea-pigs, then rabbits; besides this, her roots were watered with several pails of blood a day which I ordered from the slaughter-house; under this treatment Suzanne soon reached a height of seven feet.

"Well, to cut the story short: she grew higher and higher, and in the end had to be fed on lambs, then sheep and pigs, not to mention the red water, which was doubled.

"This protecting grating has surrounded Suzanne for a long time now, for when she was scarcely five feet high she seized me one evening, and I had great difficulty in escaping from her embrace. If I had met with this adventure a few months later I should not have the pleasure of being here at this moment!

"You guess to what use Suzanne is put? If anyone refuses to give us information which our duty forces us to seek—this is the present case—we bring him to this house, tied to the seat of a motor; we then question him again, and if he remains obdurate we thrust him behind this grating; then we leave him. Of course no traces remain, and the most minute search would reveal nothing. Am I not at liberty to cultivate a *Nepenthes* if I choose? . . . Well, for the last time I ask: 'Will you tell us what we want to know?' If your answer is 'yes,' we are all attention; if 'no,' Suzanne will take you in hand—and she is hungry! See how greedily her boughs are waving! How she stretches them out toward you—yes, toward you, for *she understands perfectly well that you are the prey!* . . . Why, she already smells stronger, and she is beginning to sing!"

In very truth, the fearful stench of a menagerie was growing more powerful, and the hairy tentacles, as they twisted and turned, produced a gentle, whining sound, like that of a flight of swallows.

Wilson was filled with that unspeakable terror which whitens the hair of the bravest. But the very imminence of the danger kept his mind clear. What could he do? First, he must gain time; otherwise, this very minute would be the last of his life.

In the tone of someone who at last comes to a painful decision, he said: "I have no choice left: my answer is 'yes.' You will know the treaty. . . . But first give me food. . . . I am fainting. . . ."

"Bravo! I am delighted! I should have been sorry to—we will give you a meal which will loosen your tongue. And Suzanne shall not be the loser, the sweet creature!"

One of the two giants disappeared and soon returned staggering under the dead body of a whole ox, whose horned head was swinging to and fro.

He opened a very low side door and pushed his burden in.

Ten tentacles immediately snatched up the enormous bloody mass and threw it into the top of the trunk; all the boughs clasped it frantically, and it soon disappeared amid the confusion of foliage. A dreadful noise was heard, and then all was silent; the branches remained folded, giving the plant the appearance of an enormous mushroom.

"She would have liked you better; she prefers living creatures," said the doctor. "Now she will remain two hours, folded up like that and quite harmless, while the process of digestion is going on. Then the branches will fall and begin to wave again, and it would be very imprudent then to come within their reach. Come; you will excuse me if I take you to my laboratory instead of a dining-room—this is the abode of a horticulturist."

THE laboratory was a large room, with walls painted gray, full of implements for the study of chemistry, electricity, bacteriology, etc.

Some were of ancient shape, and Wilson remembered having seen similar ones in scientific museums, labeled "Alchemy."

The doctor placed bread, ham, cheese and a bottle of wine before the young diplomat.

Wilson ate voraciously. The very smell of the bread intoxicated him; the ham melted in his mouth like a delicious sweet; he drank, and the taste of old Bordeaux tickled his palate.

Soon a pleasant feeling of warmth and comfort overcame him; life began to flow through his veins. The food had made a new man of him. He began to feel optimistic, in spite of everything; he no longer despaired of escape.

If only—but he searched in vain among the instruments for a knife, a pair of compasses, anything which could serve as a weapon. There was nothing—nothing but test-tubes, bottles, funnels.

The others were carrying on a whispered conversation in a corner, without paying much attention to him.

The only thing that attracted his attention was a phial with a label bearing the word: "Chloroform." He slipped it into his pocket. His death should be painless. . . .

As Wilson swallowed his last mouthful, Dr. Salzmann said: "We are listening."

There was a little wine left in the bottle. The prisoner poured it out, drank it and smacked his lips.

"You have a good cellar, sir."

"Yes. Well?"

"Well, you scoundrels, did you really suppose I ever intended to divulge anything? I was hungry, nothing more."

The doctor's face puckered into a hundred wrinkles.

"That is all you have to say? Think what that great cage contains!"

"It contains my death, that is all; my answer remains the same!"

A few moments later, bound again, Wilson was carried by the two giants to the rotunda. The horrible tree was still dozing, with its tentacles folded. But the awakening would come soon!

A large door was unbolted. They placed the captive against the trunk, which was warm like a living body.

The door was double-locked and bolted.

"I regret your obstinacy. You are a brave man," said the doctor, whose exultation seemed to have subsided like that of the tree.

He bowed and departed. The assistants gave a stiff, military salute, then made a right-about turn. . . .

Left alone, the prisoner first turned his attention to escaping from the horrible contact of the warm trunk; he succeeded gradually by rolling over on his side, and he did not stop till he had reached the corner of the cage farthest from the plant.

Either from forgetfulness or from cruelty, the doctor had omitted to turn off the light; it flooded the immense conservatory, and the rotunda. In the distance, somewhere behind all the tropical plants the fountain continued its never-ceasing splash, splash. . . .

He was lost! No hope was left! The dreadful creature would soon awaken, and then——

He thought of the chloroform; at the last moment he would inhale it and deaden all sensibility. With his free hand he took the phial out of his pocket and left it uncorked for a few moments; a smell of fresh apple prevailed over the stench of the monster.

But he clung tenaciously to life, and his youth inspired him with confidence in the result of any fight maintained to the end. He did not give in. Horrible as his position undoubtedly was, he wanted to show fight.

They had bound him not very tightly after all, and in a few minutes, at the cost of a few scratches, he was free.

Quick to act, and concentrating all his strength in a mighty effort, he tried first the little door, then the big one, but both resisted. He tried to smash the grating, but not a wire gave way. He tried to climb, and only wounded his hands to no effect; even had he succeeded, it would have been useless, for the tentacles would reach to the very top of the rotunda.

He could do nothing more—only wait. He sat down with his elbows on his knees, and his face buried in his hands.

All the happy moments of his life rose before him with extraordinary distinctness—his first years at school, his travels, his successes in diplomacy. . . . The sweet, sad face of his mother smiled at him as clearly as when she used to sing him to sleep in his cot! . . . And his father—what grief it would be to the poor old man who was so proud of him! . . .

What joys he might have tasted, what great things he might have accomplished! . . .

If he could only write to Milly, the traitress whom he still loved! If he could but throw through the grating a note which they would find afterwards! . . . He felt in his pockets; yes, a pencil and paper.

With difficulty he wrote, in great round letters:

"Milly, I die with no hatred in my heart. I love you, and my last thought shall be of you, my ever-beloved, my beautiful!"

A hissing sound caused him to look up. The plant was no longer asleep. It looked like an enormous Gorgon's head or a nest of furious serpents; the tentacles were waving with strength. One seized upon Wilson, who, mad with terror, uncorked the bottle of chloroform and held it to his nostrils.

In his haste he let fall a drop of the liquid on the tentacle which had just clutched him by the shoulder, when, to his joy and surprize, the strange arm fell limply down beside the trunk. Instinctively he sprinkled another enormous coil which was about to wind itself around his neck; this one, too, fell like the first, apparently dead.

But the others were whirling around him; they seized him in their embrace, and, as they waved backward in their fury, they carried him to the top of the pulp, above the sort of mouth in which the ox had disappeared.

Half fainting, bruised by the awful embrace, he dropped there the phial. At the same moment he fell heavily to the ground.

Here he remained motionless and dazed. What would happen next? Why were the monster's tentacles not crushing him? It took him a few seconds to make sure that he was on the ground, bruised but alive.

He struggled against a painful numbness, caused by the violence of his fall and the odor of the chloroform. He felt sick and faint, and a cold perspiration was pouring from him.

When, at last, he was able to see clearly, he discovered that the horrible tree was in a new posture; all its branches were hanging down motionless as though dead; the doctor's frightful plant had the appearance of a gigantic weeping willow.

He was only a few inches from the arms which but a moment before had been so ferocious, and although they appeared harmless now, he rose hastily and took refuge in the farthest corner of the rotunda. Here the stupefying influence of the chloroform and of the fall passed away altogether, and he tried to understand what had happened.

This was not difficult! The providential bottle of benumbing fluid had saved him, at least for the moment, from a frightful death. . . . All plants are sensitive to the effects of chloroform, and this carnivorous tree, which in some ways seemed to belong rather to the animal than the vege-

table kingdom, must have peculiarly felt the benumbing influence. At this moment it was just as insensible as a patient under a surgical operation, but this was only a respite; it would awaken from this insensibility as it awoke after its meal, and the peril would be just as frightful as before.

But any respite from death is precious. The prisoner made another attempt to open the doors and climb up the grating, the upper parts of which perhaps were less strongly built; but again the wires only wounded his hands, and again the doors resisted all his efforts; although the monster was slumbering, escape was as impossible as ever.

WILSON at last sat down again, weary and despairing; he half regretted that it was not all over, for the chloroform had only prolonged his agony. If die he must, he would rather die at once.

Time passed thus, till at last he became aware of a pale blue light which revealed first a glass dome, and then the tops of the highest of the tropical plants. At last, then, dawn had come, but this half-light was sickening, horrible. Far away — but perhaps he only imagined this—the angelus slowly rang forth. The mighty murmur of the waves, as they rose and fell, increased. Near at hand, birds were chirping.

Worn out, bruised and bleeding, almost careless of his fate, Wilson gradually yielded to sleep.

The sounds of steps aroused him from his torpor and brought him to his feet; as he gazed through the grating, he distinguished, in the distance, the silhouette of Dr. Salzmann, coming toward the rotunda.

The terrible man would find out that his victim was still alive; he would call his acolytes. . . .

The captive hid behind the horrible tree, among the tentacles. Like a child playing at hide-and-seek, he turned, in spite of his disgust, around the warm trunk, dodging the doctor as the winding paths led the latter's steps first to the right and then to the left.

When the doctor saw the extraordinary attitude of Suzanne, he uttered an exclamation of surprize. For a moment he stood motionless, then to Wilson's unspeakable joy he opened the great door of the cage, and cautiously entered. With the end of his stick he touched the tentacles, being careful all the time to slouch as far away as possible; but the horrible arm still hung lifeless as before.

He ventured a little nearer—and thought he saw a phantom.

Wilson had sprung away from the plant. The doctor uttered a cry of terror, and at the same moment there fell on his jaw a crushing blow.

He fell limply to the ground. . . .

Wilson rushed out of the cage and ran along the first path he came to, but the conservatory was a perfect labyrinth, and he soon found himself back again at the rotunda. In vain he tried another path, and yet another; at last, one led him to the side of the conservatory, overlooking the sea. He brushed away the steam with his hand, and, looking through the glass, he saw in the rosy dawn a pale stretch of sands, and farther on, the green, tumultuous waves of the sea.

There were several large doors leading out of the conservatory; he opened and stepped out, but the icy air and the roar of the waves benumbed him. He found himself on a tiny balcony which ran along the side of the building, while below him was the smooth wall of the great house.

Below lay a fog, hiding the bottom of the abyss, while above, sea birds were whirling round uttering their harsh cries.

How was he to descend? Was there some means of escape?

He left the balcony, but had walked only a few moments in the soporific heat of the conservatory when

the sound of steps, cries, shouts for help, following each other in quick succession, caused him to turn back. He still had a few moments in which to make good his escape, for the assistants would not immediately grasp what had happened and decide on their course of action; but, when they saw the open door, the condition of their chief, and the torpor of the plant, they would understand all too soon that their prisoner was escaping.

Again he dashed on to the balcony in search of some means by which he could descend. At one end was an iron bar, which, strengthened every three feet by strong cramps, rose up from the sands, followed the contour of the cliff, and then rose straight up to the top of the conservatory, where it doubtless joined a lightning-conductor; this bar passed up one end of the balcony, and Wilson believed himself saved. It was a perilous descent, but he had no choice.

He climbed over the handrail and grasped the bar, but horrible giddiness seized him; the wall, the cliff, the bar, the balcony, all danced before his distracted eyes; he had a terrible feeling of nausea, and was drenched in a cold sweat; only a supreme effort saved him from falling. Hastily climbing back on to the balcony, panting with horror, he wiped his cold, clammy hands. Was his courage going to fail him at the last moment? He tried to accustom his eyes to the sight of the abyss, but the horrible depths and the mist hiding the ground from view sent him back into the conservatory.

He lay down flat behind a clump of trees. The two giants, armed with guns, passed quite close to him without seeing him.

As soon as they had gone, he arose and ran along in the opposite direction toward the door at the foot of the iron staircase. Surely he was saved now, for he felt certain that no one else lived in the house. He could get out.

He started back. In the frame of the door he dimly saw a great green cloak, a head of glorious red hair, a pale face, a beautiful bare arm, and a hand grasping a revolver. Milly!

She stood between him and life. . . .

With the suddenness and precision which had one day astonished him at a rifle range, and the cruelty which he now remembered he had sometimes seen flash from the beautiful green eyes, she was going to——

Ah, no!

She stepped forth from the shadow, like a Rembrandt from its frame; tears were streaming down her cheeks, and despair was written on her features. In her other hand she held aloft the farewell letter which Wilson had written on the rotunda.

"I have read it. Forgive me—and come—quickly!" she said in low tones.

He followed her. The narrow stairs hindered their steps; when they reached the top, they passed through several large rooms, a hall and a kitchen dimly lit up by the gray dawn. Then Milly stopped and turned round.

He noticed all these details as though in a dream. . . .

She softly opened the door. The morning was icy cold; birds were twittering all round. . . .

"Go through the kitchen garden. You will find a little door in the wall; the gardener always leaves the key in it. The path descends almost perpendicularly, then runs along beside the sea. When you come to a cross fixed into a block of granite, stop and wait."

He was in the state of utter fatigue in which the will, incapable of making a choice, eagerly follows without reflection any advice. However, he stopped long enough to say: "Come with me!" Her swift gesture threw aside the mantle and revealed her exquisite ball gown, and her beautiful white neck, as she pointed to the door in the wall.

"Quick!" she urged.

He hurried along. Before closing the door of the garden he turned and saw Milly still on the same spot; her attitude urged him to hasten, but at the same time expressed such poignant grief that he was tempted to return.

Slipping on the pebbles, clinging to the bushes, he descended the difficult path. An iron band seemed to encircle his head; the sea air made his eyes smart. He began to cough. When he was close to the sea, he took up a handful of water and dashed it over his face and head.

He walked a long, long way along the edge of the roaring channel till at last, in the distance, his uncertain gaze fell on a rusty iron cross on a great rock.

The horrible house, far away in the distance, was tiny and white on the bluish cliff.

Suddenly it disappeared in a mass of black smoke, while at the same time a loud report echoed and re-echoed among the rocks. All the birds around flew up into the sky. . . .

AT NOON some coast-guards found Wilson raving in delirium.

When he at last arose from an attack of brain fever he told his story, but no one believed it.

The police made inquiries, without result. Yet he was able to guide the officers to the ruins of the conservatory, and show an immense greasy spot, which, he declared, was where the *Nepenthes* had stood.

Superstitious Terror Held the Community in Its Grip

Dread at Darracombe

By VIOLET M. METHLEY

IT WAS old Mrs. Yeoven, who lived in the cottage on the edge of the wood, who heard the terrible thing.

She was just pottering about her kitchen, doing the last necessary duties before going to bed, shaking up the cat's cushion and so on, the silence only broken by the hurried ticking of the grandfather's clock.

Then, suddenly, breaking that silence it came—a shriek of wild, terrified agony, repeated once—twice—each time lower, but more heart-rending, the scream of a woman in extremest fear and pain.

For a moment the old woman stood motionless, trembling from head to foot, her face working pitifully. But she was plucky, and next instant she had pulled herself together, stumbled across to the door, fumbled with the latch and flung it open.

The uneven line of the trees in the wood stood out black against the sky, separated from where Mrs. Yeoven stood only by a strip of garden ground. And from out of that blackness came a low moaning of anguish, a sobbing cry: "Oooeo—eh! Oh-h-h-h!" It wailed and died away into choking silence.

Without waiting to put on outdoor gear, the old woman set off at an unsteady run, down the path and out along the lane, under the high, overarching hedges, her heart thumping in time to a gasping breath.

It was a bare quarter-mile to the nearest cottage, Henry Caunter's, but Mrs. Yeoven was almost exhausted when she reached the door and beat upon it with her hands.

"'Mis' Caunter!—Mis' Caunter!" she cried quaveringly, and the master of the house himself opened the door, standing, a burly figure, against the oblong of warmly lit kitchen.

"Why, Mrs. Yeoven!—what's up, ma'am?" he asked. "Come in and sit down. Here, Mother, 'tes Mrs. Yeoven!"

"Oh, Mis' Caunter, you'm best come up to wood at once," the old woman burst out. "There's a woman—murdered there——"

"My God, what d'you mean?" Caunter stared.

"'Tes true. I heard 'un—just inside wood seem'n'ly—screamin' and shriekin', poor soul! Somethin' fearful, 'twas—and when I runned along, her was moanin' and groanin'. Don't 'ee lag, Mis' Caunter—come 'ee along and see who 'tis."

"Yes, yes, Mrs. Yeoven, I'll come—an' I'll get Black and Saunders, too." Henry Caunter was already reaching up for his old-fashioned rabbiting-gun.

"A lantern, too, 'e'll want to view the poor soul," the old woman quavered. "'Tes gashly dark in wood."

"You'm right—Mother, gi's the old lantern, and put a candle-end in it."

With the lantern bobbing in advance, like a gigantic glow-worm, the party of three men were on their way up the lane, treading heavily through the muddy ruts. Mrs. Yeoven trudged panting behind, and stopped by her own gate to watch the light disappear into the wood's blackness.

Quivering with dread and curiosity, she waited there, straining her old eyes, leaning heavily on the gate. What poor soul would they find there—some gipsy tramping woman?—someone from the village?—ought she to have fetched Dr. Carew, to be ready?

Here and there through the trees she caught a glimpse of the searching lantern; presently it gleamed more brightly, was moving toward her again. Mrs. Yeoven tottered forward.

"Well, what have 'ee found?" she questioned eagerly. "Who's the poor soul?"

"There's nawbody there—nawbody and nothin'," Caunter declared. "All through wood us have searched."

"But I tell 'ee there *is!*" Mrs. Yeoven was shrill with certainty. "Shriekin' somethin' awful—moanin'—groanin'——"

"Owl, likely," Bert Black commented gruffly.

"*Owl!*" Mrs. Yeoven's voice held concentrated scorn. "As if I didn' know owls—as if I'd not been with child-bearing women by the hundred, and didn' know how a poor, dear soul cries out when 'tes her agony!"

Mrs. Yeoven's experience being unquestionable and certainly unmatchable by the group of sheepish men, they found no direct answer. But Caunter shuffled his feet and replied, doggedly, "Well, if 'twas a woman, she'm gone; there's nobody in wood; no, nor signs of blood. Combed it, so we did."

"In the dark, an' by that lil' lantern!" Mrs. Yeoven snapped. "Hid under some bush she is, poor soul, an' if I were twenty years younger, I'd go an' look meself, that I would!"

But the men were not to be driven to further efforts that night; they slouched sullenly away, leaving Mrs. Yeoven to sit up by herself for the night's remainder, till she slept by

fits and starts a few hours before dawn

AFTER a good night's rest and over his breakfast, Caunter was inclined to joke with his wife over old Mother Yeoven's fright, and to maintain the owl hypothesis.

"Them gashly burrds 'owl somethin' fearful nights," he declared, with his mouth full of bacon, and only scoffed when Mrs. Caunter ventured to say that Mrs. Yeoven, living by the wood, must have had as long an experience of owls as of child-bearing women-folk.

As was his wont, he met Bert Black and Joe Saunders at the end of the lane half an hour later, and the three slouched off workward together. But just by Darracombe Church, they were met by news, conveyed to them through the medium of the postman.

He arrested them with a jerk of the thumb toward a small whitewashed cottage opposite the vicarage.

"Heard what's happened, you chaps?" he asked. "Young Sallie Service, she'm run away; leastways, she disappeared last night, and Mis' Service do be in a ter'ble way, for fear summat have happened to she."

The three listeners looked at each other, as their slow brains assimilated the news. Then Henry Caunter spoke slowly.

"Why—'spose 'twasn't *she* then—"

"Nay, now t'wouldn't ha' been *she*——" Bert Black demurred doubtfully.

"Looks as though might hev' been *she*——" Saunders drawled, and the postman, a more alert individual, snapped them up.

"Now, what be you three talkin' of?" he demanded, his eyes bright with an interest which became his mercurial profession.

Slowly, Caunter gave the facts and the postman nodded gravely.

"Looks nasty, uncommon nasty!" he commented. "Seems you fellows ought to go straight to police station, and tell young Gipps what you seen an' heard last night."

"But us didn't see nor hear nawthing—that's just it, 'ee see!" Caunter protested, but the postman interrupted.

"What you *might* have seen an' heard, then—'tes all the same. Look here—I'll come along wi' 'ee."

LIKE a forest fire rumors spread through Darracombe, and within half an hour Constable Gipps was at old Mrs. Yeoven's, extracting her story. Before 11 o'clock he had gleaned two other policemen from neighboring hamlets and was making ready to search the wood for the second time.

Henry Caunter, lopping a hedge, paused to watch the three stalwart, blue-clad figures disappear amongst the trees, and even to his slow brain the spring morning was overhung by a creeping horror, as he thought what they might find there—what might have been there in the darkness last night.

Little Sallie Service—the prettiest girl in the village—the girl they'd all seen grow up. If old Mother Yeoven had told the truth, it might be *her* body lying hidden in the wood.

Three hours of police search discovered nothing, but at dinner-time Saunders gave Henry Caunter a fresh piece of news.

"Seems young Ted Havant has disappeared, too," he said, with careful carelessness.

"Wha-aa-at?" Caunter's jaw fell in his interest.

"Yees. Funny-like, 'tes. . . . All same time, and after the way he's been hanging round Sallie, ever since he comed back from sea, though her father ordered him out of house. . . . They tells I Mis' Service do be half frantic-like, swearin' as Ted done it, that he's Sallie's murderer."

"Why, why, there's no sayin' as

the poor soul *be* murdered yet——" Caunter shuffled his feet uneasily.

"Looks like it, putting things together," Saunders said. "That tale of Mrs. Yeoven's sounds like dirty work in wood, surely—fits in wi' the rest, too—the poor girl disappearing, and Ted Havant—just as he would, if he'd done the deed."

Constable Gipps, eager to show himself more competent than the usual village policeman, was even more confident that it all fitted in, and that the only mystery about the case was the disappearance of the girl's body.

"An' that only means he's hidden it more cleverly than most murderers," the constable declared to his cronies. "Hid it, an' made for Plymouth, thinking to get away in a ship. Slippery chaps, these sailors, but we're having the ports watched for him already."

THAT Ted Havant had disappeared was undeniable, and even his mother could not account for his absence. He had gone, and after a violent quarrel with old Sam Service about the young sailor's courtship of Sallie. The girl had promised her parents that she would see him once more, and tell him to go away—and Ted's hot temper and devotion to Sallie were well known. It was easy enough to picture that final interview, and its tragic end, there in the shadows of the wood.

Only Havant's mother, in her tiny cottage, surrounded by her son's foreign curiosities and outlandish pets, persisted in her fierce conviction of his innocence.

"Quick-tempered my Ted may be, but he wouldn't hurt anybody weaker than himself—not if it was to save his life," she declared. "Look how gentle he is with childer and beasts—the dumb creatures all love him—don't 'ee, Jacko?"

The small monkey perched in the chimney corner whimpered in answer and sprang on to Mrs. Havant's shoulder. She faced the young policeman with smoldering anger in her dark eyes, set in a tiny withered face, oddly monkey-like, too.

"And 'ee say that my Ted has killed a poor young girl as he luved! Heaven pity you for the lie, Bob Gipps, and be off out of my house," she said, low-voiced. "My Ted!"

Gipps retreated sheepishly and justified himself afterward.

"Mothers be all alike—unreasonable beings," he declared. "'Tes of no use to argue with them—reckon Judas Iscariot's, she'd say just the same to this day! Not as you'd expect Mrs. Havant to allow as Ted were a murderer—'tes against nature. But that don't make him innocent, *all* same."

THEN, on the third night after the double disappearance, the tragedy and the mystery deepened a hundredfold.

The "Blue Dove" in Darracombe had closed, a little after the legal hour, since conversation had been so absorbing in the bar and stabilized, so to speak, by the presence of Constable Gipps himself. A twice-renewed search had still failed to discover any body in the wood, and Henry Caunter and his two neighbors were still discussing the matter as they made their ways homeward in the spring darkness.

They lingered by Caunter's gate for a few last words, glancing along the shadowy lane toward the dark barrier of trees beyond Mrs. Yeoven's cottage.

And, suddenly, cutting in upon their slow speech came again a woman's shriek from the wood. Hideous, heart-breaking, it wailed out through the night silence, rising higher and higher in extremest anguish, then dying down to low sobs and pitiful groans. As it sank at last into silence, Caunter spoke unsteadily.

"Mercy on us! Did—did ivver you hear the like? That—that be some poor woman dying, sure 'nough."

Down the lane old Mrs. Yeoven came running again, half horrified, half triumphant.

"You heared it?" she whispered. "'Tes the same, the very same—'tes she, poor girl!—poor soul!"

"But—he can't be murderin' of she *again,*" Caunter stammered. "'Tes against all reason!"

"Reason!—reason! What hev' that gashly thing to do wi' reason?" The old woman's voice grew shrill. "Tell 'ee that be her poor, sufferin' ghost, cryin' out from that whist place, as her did when her was killed, three nights agone—cryin' out for Christian burial, and for vengeance 'pon him what did the deed."

With shaking, skinny hand outstretched and bare white locks flying, old Mrs. Yeoven had much of the air of a witch or prophetess, and the three men, staring at her in awed silence, felt their doubts melting away. And, almost before they could collect their thoughts, the terrible sounds came again, louder than before, and Saunders stumbled off down the lane to summon Gipps.

A third time, the wailing shrieks broke out from the wood, and the constable, listening, as white-faced as the others, did not suggest searching the place again that night. Better wait till the morning, when search would be easier. . . .

Easier, but no more successful than before. Again the wood was ransacked from end to end by the constables, aided by a dozen volunteer helpers; the undergrowth was dragged aside, doubtful spots dug up with spade and pick. Yet, against all reason, every soul in Darracombe, including Constable Gipps himself, was now more convinced than ever that murder had been done in the wood, that the body was still concealed there, somewhere. It might seem impossible, but then so was that awful sound which so many of them had heard, which so many more were to hear again.

A dread more tangible than that inspired by any human murderer hung over Darracombe, a horror of the supernatural, of the thing which cried from the wood, shaking reason to its very center. Five centuries before, all the villagers passing that dark covert of trees would have hurried past, with head averted, crossing themselves. . . . As it was, they avoided it, except when protected by numbers.

But a terrible fascination drew them to the neighborhood at night, since only at night had the fearsome thing been heard.

For three evenings almost all the inhabitants of Darracombe gathered in the lane which led to Mrs. Yeoven's when darkness fell, hanging about the gate, from whence led the footpath to the wood, whispering, listening, hoping and yet fearing a repetition of the shrieks.

Two nights passed in silence, but on the third, as the knots and clusters of villagers waited in whispering silence, the stillness was broken once again by those appalling shrieks and wails, dying down into blood-curdling groans, rising again to agonized cries, dying, rising, more terrible and nerve-shaking than ever.

Mrs. Yeoven, listening with the others, shook her old head and muttered, "Aye, aye! Poor suffering soul! Her blood's cryin' out—that's what it do be. Cryin' and moanin' from the earth, against him as did put 'un out of the world."

A low murmur ran through the groups of villagers, and suddenly from the outskirts of the gathering broke out frantic weeping, and a woman's voice sobbing piteously.

"My Sallie—my li'l Sallie!"

"'Tes poor dear Mis' Service," men and women whispered to each other. "She'm half frantic—her hus-

band didn' ought to have let her come —hearin' that gashly thing——"

"Aye, but likely he couldn' stop her," another temporized. "Mrs. Havant—she'm here, too."

"My li'l girl—my baby," the pitiful sobbing went on. "To think of her lyin' there—and nawthing done to find him what killed her—the cruel brute what murdered her."

Suddenly her voice grew shrill and harsh, rose hysterically through the dusk.

"You'm all standing by—you've given he the chance to get clean away —that's what you've done!"

"There, there, Alcie woman, don't 'ee take on like that—don't 'ee talk so." Kindly Tom Service tried to soothe his wife, but she broke away from him, and ran toward where the policeman stood, clutching at his arm, raising her pitiful, working face to his.

"You—you—what be *you* a-doin', Sam Gipps?" she demanded. "There be she cryin' from the wood—cryin' from the place where her poor body's hid away, and you've not the pluck to follow that cryin'—to see where it do come from. A coward—that's what you be, Sam Gipps! A coward!"

The constable shuffled his feet uneasily, glanced from side to side, tried to free his arm from the thin fingers which clutched it.

"We've searched every inch of wood, ma'am," he said gruffly. "All the chaps know we have—and we'll do it again tomorrow."

"Tomorrow—when she'm a cryin' to you tonight!" Skinny, ineffective Mrs. Service had taken on a tragic dignity in this moment. "If 'ee be a *man*, go now!"

CONSTABLE GIPPS hesitated only a moment, then rose to the occasion. Suddenly he drew himself up to his burly, square-shouldered height, made a gesture as though tightening his uniform belt, and strode toward the stile, beyond which the footpath, leading to the wood, showed pale and ghost-like.

"I be going now," he announced firmly. "Be any of you chaps comin' therealong, too? If not, I be going alone."

There was a pause, then a movement amongst the menfolk, a separating of themselves from the clustered women.

"All right, Sam, I'll come," one voice spoke, and the response led after it a succession of others.

"Me, too!"—"Yes, us'll come!"—"So'll I"—"And I——"

The group round Gipps thickened; there was a stir amongst the farther fringes of the villagers down the lane. The constable glanced at his following, and paused, with one solid leg raised to cross the stile, to speak confidently to Mrs. Service.

"Don't 'ee take on so, ma'am. We'll find the body of your poor darter, for certain sure, if it be there to find——"

Startlingly and unexpectedly, Gipps was interrupted; from the shadow of the overarching trees a girl's laugh broke out irrepressibly, then a girl's voice.

"Body? What d'you mean? Mother, dear, what is it?"

A slim figure in a pale dress ran forward from the dusk; Mrs. Service stared wildly, spoke in a hoarse whisper, "Sallie—Sallie—*alive!*"

"Very much alive, Mother darling!" fresh and clear, the girl's voice rang, followed by the sound of a kiss. "There, doesn't that tell you I'm all right? Oh, Mother, poor dear Mother, did you really think I was dead?"

"Dead—and murdered! We were sure of it, Sallie."

"Murdered! Oh! How terrible! Poor Mother! Poor Dad! I'm sorry—I never, never meant——"

"But where were 'ee, Sallie?" Mrs. Service clung to her daughter.

"At—at Whitcombe—away on the moor—staying at the li'l inn there—" Sallie broke off, then finished boldly: "Ted and I!"

"Ted—Ted Havant!" Mrs. Service gasped. "But—but it was him as murdered you—so us thought."

"Not murdered — married!" A man's voice and a man's laugh came from the tall figure behind Sallie. "You mustn't blame her, Mrs. Service—it was all my fault. Married a week ago, we were—slipped off quietly, seeing how set against me you and Mr. Service were. You see, we found that we just couldn't live without each other—didn't we, Sallie, love?"

"Yes, dear," very softly the girl's answer came through the dusk. "So you must try to forgive us, Dad, and Mother. After all, you felt the same—didn't you?—before *you* were married. But—I hated deceivin' you, all the same."

A little sob broke from Mrs. Service.

"Oh, Sallie! li'l girl—I'll forgive you anythin', as you're not dead—not murdered——"

Breaking through her last words came once again the terrible sound from the wood, rising to the wailing shrieks, sinking to the blood-chilling moans, and old Mrs. Yeoven clutched at Havant's arm.

"There—what be that, young fellow?" she demanded, her voice still accusing. "What be that dreadsome crying—you answer me that! That's what we did think was poor Sallie's ghostie, cryin' on us—but what *be* it?"

Havant stood listening, his head raised, listened until the last weird moans had died away into stillness, then turned to face the groups behind him, with a little nod.

"So *that* is what it was!" he said.

"You know what it be?" Constable Gipps questioned him.

"Yes, and it's my fault, too, though not in the way you thought. I didn't know what I was doing, but—look here, I'll tell you. Six weeks ago, when I came back from my last voyage, I brought a lot of beasts and birds as usual, and one of them was from Ceylon—a small brown bird I bought in the bazar at Colombo. I didn't know what the thing was—a bit like an owl, and a bit like a hawk, and as peevish as it could be! Wouldn't eat, wouldn't sing, sat and sulked in a corner, till I told Mother, a week ago, that I'd let it go loose, to save it from dying of peevishness. So I did—and when it was free, it found its voice, seemingly!"

"D'you mean to say——" Constable Gipps gaped.

"Yes. I didn't know what it was, but I do *now*. It is a devil-bird. I've heard 'em in the Ceylon jungles; that's the only place where they live, I believe. I thought, just as you did, that it was a woman being murdered, first time I heard it—lots of others have been taken in the same way. They're rather rare, and they're supposed never to be seen—I should think mine was caught by mistake, and the natives didn't know what it was, because they're afraid of going near 'em."

"And d'you mean to say it's going to stay there, a-'owlin' its life out, and frightening the wits out of me?" Mrs. Yeoven spoke rather tartly. After all, a small brown bird was rather a come-down from stark tragedy.

"I expect it'll die, anyway, as soon as the cold weather comes, Mrs. Yeoven," Havant said soothingly and prophetically. "It's a tropical bird, you see—used to hot weather, the devil-bird."

"A devil of a bird!" Constable Gipps summed up emphatically the opinion of the assembled worthies of Darracombe. "And the less we hear of it again, the better I shall be pleased!"

SOLA

by W.K. MASHBURN Jr.

"It took our combined efforts to hold her."

Extracts from the diary of the late Dr. Franz Dietrich, F. R. S.:

SEPTEMBER 3. I hate women. That, I suppose, is a fact too generally accepted to need elaboration, thanks to the efforts of my late wife, aided and abetted by an avidly sensational press. That my wife should sue me for divorce afforded me more relief than concern; and that she should, with a wealth of lurid detail, depict me as a fiendish scientist (or was it a scientific fiend?) was of equal unimportance. For that she caused intrusion into my personal affairs, however, and subjected my person to annoyance and restraint to the point of persecution—for *that*, I hold her and her kind in bitter enmity.

According to my own belief, the relation between the sexes should be primarily intellectual, and only incidentally physical. Intellect is always merciless; and I, except in those rarer moods when I feel the sensuous lure to which my cursed flesh is co-heir with that of the rabble in the streets, have always held women in contempt and dislike. My wife did nothing to alter my opinions, whatever I may possibly have done to hers. At least, such alteration as occurred was in the

shape of crystallizing mere opinions into positive convictions, and passive contempt into active hatred.

Yet—I still have those infrequent moods when I crave feminine companionship. It may be that I merely desire an object upon which to vent my hatred, but I am not sure that the physical element is altogether lacking in my desire.

I hope that it is.

September 18. The urge is still strong, but not strong enough. Tonight I attempted to dine with a chance acquaintance—a "pick-up" I believe the term to be—and she would have none of me. I found her strangely repulsive, and it may be that I was disagreeable. At any rate, she left me, half-way through our meal.

I can not endure those that have evolved from Eve—or was it Lilith? —and they, for their part, seem to care for me as little. I suppose, therefore, that if I am to have a woman, I shall have to create one myself, fashioned to my own order.

September 20. The idea will not leave me. It was written as a sorry gibe, but after all, why not? I believe I could do it! Already, I have produced living protoplasm. I do not see why I should not do better than Frankenstein, who was after all a scientific tyro. I have resources at my command that he could not have dreamed of.

But there's the rub! If I succeeded, I should have only one more woman. Her body would be as I fashioned it; but I can go out now, into the streets, and buy a dozen or a hundred female bodies — animate or otherwise. I could not mold her personality, her ego, to my wish as I might construct a piece of mechanism. . . .

I have written my own solution! Why not a mechanical woman? Mere artizans have built automatons that were capable of astounding feats: why should not I, the greatest physicist of this age, surpass their attempts in ratio to our respective scientific and intellectual attainments?

It *can* be done—*and I will do it!*

February 17. It is taking shape! Five months have passed since my last entry, for I have had no time to write. I have worked to the point of exhaustion, and I feel that I must rest a moment from my labor. I should not do so, however, but for the fact that I am confronted with certain difficulties which I believe may be solved more readily if approached with a fresh mind, after an interval of rest and diversion. For the present, I am well content with my progress.

It is perhaps strange that most of my time has been devoted to the shell —the physical outline of my Galatea-to-be. In this, despite my reluctance, I have had to call in outside aid—a down-at-the-heels sculptor and a besotted artist. Of course, they have no idea of my true purpose, and I have used them only in connection with such molding and coloring as I did not feel competent to undertake alone. With their help, such as it was, I think I have even bested Pygmalion in the matter of beauty of outline and symmetrical proportion.

For the material of the body, I have adopted a substance of my own, somewhat similar to the composition known as Bakelite, except that it is processed to remain permanently pliable and soft. Thanks to the really remarkable skill of my drunken artist with tints, and to the natural texture of the material, its superficial resemblance to human flesh is remarkable.

Outwardly, the automaton will be completed upon the arrival of a specially constructed wig of human hair that I have ordered from Paris, and the insertion of eyes made from the same basic compound as its "flesh." I am having a great deal of trouble with these eyes. Originally, I ordered a pair made in Switzerland, but they

were quite too artificial in appearance. The same objection attached to the ones subsequently made in my laboratory, but I believe that I have at last hit upon a formula that will overcome this fault.

What I have written gives the impression that I have neglected the mechanism of the figure, but this is not the case. I am still at the experimental stage with much of that, however, and it will be some time before I expect anything in the way of final accomplishment.

OCTOBER 1. My work progresses excellently. I have already completed most of the mechanism with which I propose to animate the manikin. Much of it was fabricated as a part of its body, which is, of course, particularly true in the case of the extremities, in which the mechanism was installed integrally. There are many small details yet to be worked out, but they present no serious obstacles.

It is only now, in the perspective, that I realize what revolutionary work I have already done. I have produced several entirely new compositions in the course of my work, and adapted others in a manner hitherto unheard of. I am sure that I shall produce a very passable mechanical imitation of voluntary and intra-animate action, as a result of the work already done, but I have become much more ambitious than that. In short, I am wondering if it is not within the bounds of possibility to give the figure a limited amount of actual if mechanical *intelligence*, as well as more mechanical motion. Of course, it would have to be dependent upon and controlled by my own thoughts, but that would be infinitely better than having it governed by nothing more than a paltry if elaborate set of clock-work. She—already I am thinking of it as "she"—is far too lovely for that.

At least, I shall make the attempt.

October 11. It is a stupendous undertaking, but there is now no doubt in my mind that I shall succeed in fabricating a purely mechanical "brain" for the automaton. I have already advanced to the stage where the remainder of my work will consist only of the application of completed theories and formulæ, which I do not propose to set down here. Suffice it to say that her central "brain" will consist of the same basic material as her body, gelatinous at the core, and hardened somewhat on the outside, but still flexible, to permit of tentacular connections with the almost minute termini of her "nervous" mechanism.

By a process of my own, which I shall not describe further than to state that it includes the use of both ultra-violet and cathode rays, in connection with a special chemical treatment of the substance used, I have well-founded hopes of making the central mass of the brain a sensitive receptacle for my own thoughts! It has long been a scientific prophecy that a sensitive material would be ultimately developed, upon which thought waves could be recorded in much the same manner as physical impressions are imposed on the sensitized paper of a kodak film.

I have every belief that I shall be able to accomplish something of the sort. In fact, I am determined to do so. I have spent almost a year upon the mechanism and composition of the body alone, and it is unthinkable that the prodigious labor I have expended should be wasted. Yet such will be the case if I am unable to succeed in my final attempt, since I can not bear to think of having her animated by purely mechanical means. I could have completed her months ago, had I been content to create nothing more than a marvelously life-like mechanical figure.

I will not have her so—she shall be a Galatea in very truth, except that

she shall live and yet not breathe the breath of life, and so shall she be free of the pettiness that inspires the spawn of Eve. Thus, if I smash her for the simple pleasure of it, she will not bear me malice after I repair her, nor haul me before courts and lunacy commissions for having done so. Her very moods will be my own, when I will that she have moods at all; and her intellect will equal my own—since, in truth, it will but mirror mine!

December 14. She is almost finished. Physically, she is already as complete, in every trivial detail, as any living woman.

I have only to make a few minor connections between her "brain" and the rest of her mechanism, and—she will *think!*

DECEMBER 17. It is done! She lives! She breathes! No!—thank whatever Powers there be, she does *not* breathe!

I have encountered success beyond my wildest dreams, and much more quickly than I had dared to hope. Perhaps that is because I have put the labor of months into as many weeks, and my heart and soul into the task. At any rate, she *lives!* Really lives, because her sensitive brain-core not only registers and acts upon my thoughts, but retains impulses over indefinite periods, and uses them of her own volition. My experiments, thus far, indicate that she is capable of independent motion, and a remarkable amount of initiative, from fifteen minutes to an hour after I have implanted a definite impulse upon her brain.

It is amusing to note, when these deliberately implanted impulses have begun to wear off, how she reacts to my random thoughts. Her erratic motions are extremely ludicrous, since my mind, when not focussed upon a definite objective, habitually leaps from point to point.

I have neglected to state that "She" (I must give her a name!) is actually capable of some of the more pronounced facial expressions, by means of the proper "muscles" directly connected with her brain. Thus, she can smile after a fashion, although rather weakly, and frown in a really creditable manner. As her eyes are slightly mobile, and her eyelids "wink" at regular intervals, her beautiful face presents a remarkably animated and life-like appearance. In fact, she is capable of almost anything that a living woman can accomplish, except that she is mute—which is no fault, but a virtue. I purposely left her so, although I have no doubt that I should have been able to endow her with some sort of vocal apparatus. I repeat that this omission was quite intentional.

December 20. I can not think of a better, so I have given her the Spanish name of Sola. It means "alone," and as she certainly has no counterpart, the name is more than a mere conceit.

I am almost in love with her. I am sure that I should be, except that she repulses me by her utter lack of response. She is really incapable of anything of the sort, since she has no physical senses whatever, and it would seem that, after all, I was wrong in supposing intellect to be the dominating factor in attraction between the sexes.

I do not even seem to be able to impress her mind greatly with the bare idea. Apropos of this fact, I have observed that Sola responds much more thoroughly to impressions arising from certain of my moods than to others. This is particularly true of anger, to which she is remarkably sensitive. It is possible that the thoroughness of her response to my telepathic control is in direct ratio to the vividness of my own thought; in which case it would seem that my temper is the source of my most definite emotion.

December 22. My hand trembles so that I can hardly record my thoughts. Tonight, Sola's exquisite body, gleaming ever so softly in the light of the shaded lamp in my library, was too much for my self-control. I have neglected to set down the fact that she remains nude, which is not unnatural in view of the fact that my household is without facilities to care for feminine wants. In the subdued light, she seemed startlingly alive—the more so as part of her mechanism is devised to animate her breast regularly in simulation of natural respiration.

Forgetting for the moment her mechanical composition, I seized her in my arms. My forgetfulness was short-lived, however, since, for all her response to my emotions, I might as well have had a dressmaker's wax model crushed to my breast. She could not respond to passion, however much her brain-core registered my thoughts, because she possesses no means of response. I wrote love on her brain as I write the word here—with precisely the same result.

Realizing the futility of my actions, I flung her sprawling into the depths of a great chair, and groaned aloud. Self-ridicule spurred my anger rapidly to a pitch, and I heaped my rage upon the figure in the chair. Sola responded by stiffening as she sat, and her frown could not have been bested by any living woman. At this, my fury passed the bounds of reason, and I leaped to throttle her—smash her—anything to erase the grimace with which my own handiwork flaunted its rebellion.

"I shall wring your lovely neck for you!" I think I shouted, as I leaped forward with that very definite intention.

To my amazement and consternation, Sola leaped to meet me, and her own fingers came near to doing for me what I had intended for her. My astonishment was all that saved me, taken off guard as I was. My changed thoughts weakened those I had previously implanted in her too responsive brain-core, and weakened her purpose to where I was able to hold her off until her violent impulse had lost its force. I observed, with misgiving, that this was not completely effected, even under direct force of my will, for upward of thirty minutes!

I shall have to be more careful, or my Galatea may prove herself a Frankenstein instead. I have been unable to develop a material with which to insulate her against thought receptiveness, and I can not control her except through my will. If I lose control of myself, I am likely to raise my very own anger up against me—and next time I may not be able to overcome her, for I shall not have the benefit of overwhelming surprise to flash from my mind to hers, and so weaken her.

My safest course is to remember that she is a dangerous piece of mechanism. Since she is to be nothing more than that, I suppose I may as well exhibit her to a few of the nitwits who set themselves up as scientists. Stoneman and Lesseps are both bachelors, so they will be willing to lessen the misery of their loneliness on Christmas night by coming here—especially if I tell them the full truth in the invitation. They will think me extravagant (they have already testified that I am mad, damn them!) and jump at a chance to discredit my claims.

I shall write the invitation, this very minute.

Statement by Professor James Knox Stoneman, Ph.D., D.Sc., M.A., etc., of Midwestern University:

THE foregoing remarkable document, to which this is appended at the request of the civil authorities, must be accepted with certain reservations, among which are those affecting the motive to which Dr. Dietrich

ascribes acceptance of his invitation by Professor Henri Lesseps and myself. It is true, however, that we considered, and do yet consider, many of the claims made for his automaton to have been other than conservative.

Even so, fairness compels me to admit that the figure was quite evidently a marvelously constructed piece of mechanism, and to pay tribute to the genius of Dr. Dietrich while maintaining my belief in his madness. In this opinion, Professor Lesseps concurs.

So life-like was the figure that Lesseps and I both bowed to it upon entering the doctor's library, where it was seated in a deep chair. The light was dim, and the impression was confirmed by the very life-like answering bow from the seated figure. It was cleverly done (by some sort of prearranged controls, I have no doubt) and I do not begrudge Dietrich the roar of amusement with which he observed our civility, despite his own lack of that very quality.

"What would you have done, had I left her naked?" he demanded, wiping tears of merriment from his eyes with his knuckles. "Oh, yes, I clothed her especially in deference to your well-known observance of all the niceties of convention, Professor Stoneman, and suffered the smirks of an expensive modiste to do so! However, that is beside the point. Pray be seated in those chairs, gentlemen, and I shall afford you an exhibition that you will not soon forget."

We accepted the chairs indicated by a flourish of his hand, and Dietrich busied himself removing the shade from the lamp on a table, and switched on other lights overhead. We could now recognize the automaton as such, although it remained startlingly life-like.

Dr. Dietrich next favored us with an explanation of the principles by which the figure was operated, although he was pointedly careful to omit essential details. In substance,

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his explanation (which I do not altogether accept, and neither does Professor Lesseps) was a repetition of that already written in his diary.

"Now," he at length exclaimed, "the proof of the pudding is in the eating, so follow my demonstration. I have already explained the principles by which Sola is animated, but, for your benefit, I shall speak the thoughts to which I desire her to respond."

He turned to the manikin with another of his customary flourishes, and regarded it attentively. It responded to his spoken commands in a series of exercises that were truly remarkable, and it is greatly to be regretted that, as it happened, we were later unable to submit the mechanism to the thorough examination we desired. Depending upon the evidence, it must be admitted that the figure appeared to be directed solely by Dietrich's own will.

Suddenly the doctor turned to us with an abrupt gesture. "Is she not beautiful?" he surprizingly demanded. I weighed the question, considering its irrelevance; but Lesseps, who is younger, and French into the bargain, spoke without hesitation.

"Indeed yes, Dr. Dietrich! It is a work of art!"

Dietrich regarded his creation musingly. He seemed to have lost much of his former air of malicious triumph. "A work of art!" he finally snapped, almost savagely. "Nothing but a work of art! I shall show you just how much so."

Then this amazing man of many moods leaped to the now still figure, and ripped off the few garments with which it was draped, even to the shoes and hose. Lesseps gasped, and I own myself to have been somewhat impressed by its symmetry of outline, although I considered his action an unnecessary exhibition of bad taste on Dietrich's part. Under the light, its surface took on an embarrassingly life-like sheen.

"Beautiful!" exclaimed Lesseps.

"Beautiful!" Dietrich echoed the word with a snarl. "A work of art! Is it not enough to drive any man frenzied to see such beauty so unresponsive?"

My impression of what actually followed in the next few moments is confused. Dietrich seemed suddenly to become as one demented; for, grasping a long, slinking bronze tiger which ornamented the table, he heaped vituperation upon his creation.

He rushed at the manikin, and (how, I am unprepared to explain) it met his attack as if it had been his mirrored self. Blazing hate, Dietrich backed away from the encounter. It was evident to Lesseps and me, as we sat staring with open mouths, that he was about to leap in as if in an attempt to catch his absurd opponent unawares. It was also evident that Dietrich was utterly consumed with a very frenzy of rage.

"I am ready for you, this time!" he shouted, brandishing the bronze tiger by its hind-quarters. In another instant, the weird conflict was resumed.

It was suddenly apparent that Dietrich was getting the worst of the unheard-of encounter, and Lesseps leaped to his assistance. It was well that I followed him, for it took our combined efforts to hold the manikin. While we struggled with it, Dietrich smashed at it with his improvised weapon, completely wrecking his handiwork in the end. His last blow, delivered with a culminating burst of passion, demolished the head of the figure, and it collapsed on the instant. Dietrich tottered and fell to the floor almost immediately afterward. When we picked him up and put him in a chair, he was gasping painfully, and blood ran in trickles from the corners of his mouth.

"She battered me," he gasped.

"Bones and flesh against her steel framework. I'm smashed inside."

Leaseps ran to call a doctor, but the effort was useless. Dietrich had told the truth when he said he was smashed inside. The fists of his monster, steel beneath their deceptive outer covering, had splintered half his ribs, and one of them had pierced a lung.

"If only she could have loved as she could hate!" he whispered, and died.

Unquestionably the man was mad.

VOODOO

By A. LESLIE

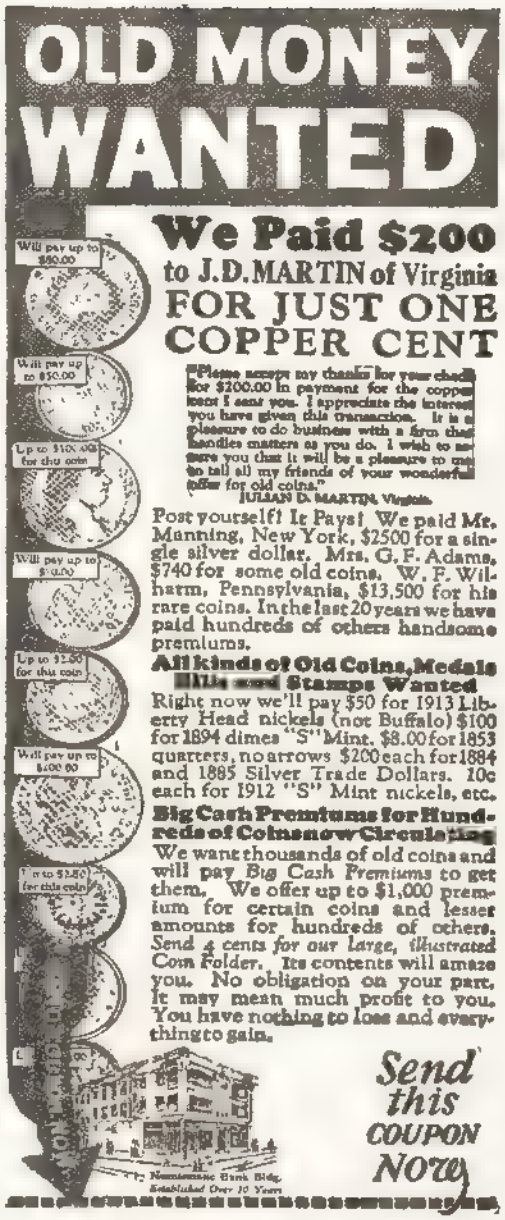
Night! black, pulsing night!
A night that the white stars shun;
The shuddering plash of blood drops
Falling, one by one!

A ghost wind wails in the high, bleak sky,
And dares not come to earth,
While croaking voices mock its moan
With shrieks of obscene mirth.

Hell-scarlet lips, and gleaming eyes,
And bodies carved from jet;
With a ghastly dew that curdles fast
The snake-pressed grass is wet.

Shadows! slithering shadows!
With stealthy menace rife;
One ghostly beam, a wicked gleam—
The stored-up light of a knife.

The stabbing glow writhes dully
'Neath a crawling mist of red;
And cleaving the clutching shadows,
Something whimpers overhead!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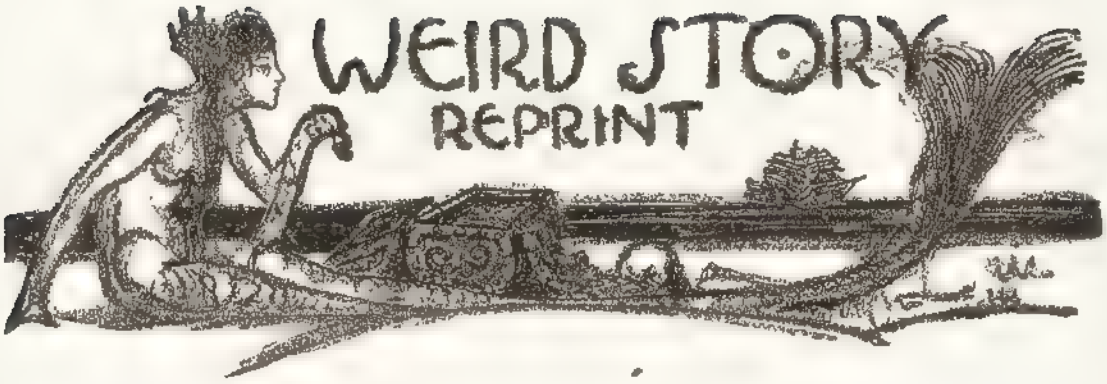

The Signal-Man

By CHARLES DICKENS

"HALLOA! Below there!"

When he heard a voice thus calling to him, he was standing at the door of his box, with a flag in his hand, furled round its short pole. One would have thought, considering the nature of the ground, that he could not have doubted from what quarter the voice came; but instead of looking up to where I stood on the top of the steep cutting nearly over his head, he turned himself about, and looked down the Line. There was something remarkable in his manner of doing so, though I could not have said for my life what. But I know it was remarkable enough to attract my notice, even though his figure was foreshortened and shadowed, down in the deep trench, and mine was high above him, so steeped in the glow of an angry sunset, that I had shaded my eyes with my hand before I saw him at all.

"Hallo! Below!"

From looking down the Line, he turned himself about again, and, raising his eyes, saw my figure high above him.

"Is there any path by which I can come down and speak to you?"

He looked up at me without replying, and I looked down at him without pressing him too soon with a repetition of my idle question. Just then there came a vague vibration in the earth and air, quickly changing into a violent pulsation, and an encoming rush that caused me to start back, as though it had a force to draw me down. When such vapor as rose to my height from this rapid train had passed me, and was skimming away over the landscape, I looked down again, and saw him replacing the flag he had shown while the train went by.

I repeated my inquiry. After a pause, during which he seemed to regard me with fixed attention, he motioned with his rolled-up flag toward a point on my level, some two or three hundred yards distant. I called down to him, "All right!" and made for that point. There, by dint of looking closely about me, I found a rough zigzag descending path notched out, which I followed.

The cutting was extremely deep, and unusually precipitate. It was made through a clammy stone, that became oozier and wetter as I went down. For these reasons, I found the way long enough to give me time to

recall a singular air of reluctance or compulsion with which he had pointed out the path.

When I came down low enough upon the zigzag descent to see him again, I saw that he was standing between the rails on the way by which the train had lately passed, in an attitude as if he were waiting for me to appear. He had his left hand at his chin, and that left elbow rested on his right hand, crossed over his breast. His attitude was one of such expectation and watchfulness that I stopped a moment, wondering at it.

I resumed my downward way, and stepping out upon the level of the railroad, and drawing nearer to him, saw that he was a dark, sallow man, with a dark beard, and rather heavy eyebrows. His post was in as solitary and dismal a place as ever I saw. On either side, a dripping-wet wall of jagged stone, excluding all view but a strip of sky; the perspective one way only a crooked prolongation of this great dungeon; the shorter perspective in the other direction terminating in a gloomy red light, and the gloomier entrance to a black tunnel, in whose massive architecture there was a barbarous, depressing, and forbidding air. So little sunlight ever found its way to this spot, that it had an earthy, deadly smell; and so much cold wind rushed through it, that it struck chill to me, as if I had left the natural world.

Before he stirred, I was near enough to him to have touched him. Not even then removing his eyes from mine, he stepped back one step, and lifted his hand.

This was a lonesome post to occupy (I said), and it had riveted my attention when I looked down from up yonder. A visitor was a rarity, I should suppose; not an unwelcome rarity, I hoped? In me, he merely saw a man who had been shut up within narrow limits all his life, and who, being at last set free, had a newly awakened interest in these

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great works. To such purpose I spoke to him; but I am far from sure of the terms I used; for, besides that I am not happy in opening any conversation, there was something in the man that daunted me.

He directed a most curious look toward the red light near the tunnel's mouth, and looked all about it, as if something were missing from it, and then looked at me.

That light was part of his charge? Was it not?

He answered in a low voice, "Don't you know it is?"

The monstrous thought came into my mind, as I perused the fixed eyes and the saturnine face, that this was a spirit, not a man. I have speculated since, whether there may have been infection in my mind.

In my turn, I stepped back. But in making the action, I detected in his eyes some latent fear of me. This put the monstrous thought to flight.

"You look at me," I said, forcing a smile, "as if you had a dread of me."

"I was doubtful," he returned, "whether I had seen you before."

"Where?"

He pointed to the red light he had looked at.

"There?" I said.

Intently watchful of me, he replied (but without sound), "Yes."

"My good fellow, what should I do there? However, be that as it may, I never was there, you may swear."

"I think I may," he rejoined. "Yes; I am sure I may."

His manner cleared, like my own. He replied to my remarks with readiness, and in well-chosen words.

He took me into his box, where there was a fire, a desk for an official book in which he had to make certain entries, a telegraphic instrument with its dial, face, and needles, and the little bell of which he had spoken. On my trusting that he would excuse the remark that he had been well educated, and (I hoped I might say without offense) perhaps educated above that station, he observed that instances of slight incongruity in such wise would rarely be found wanting among large bodies of men; that he had heard it was so in workhouses, in the police force, even in that last desperate resource, the army; and that he knew it was so, more or less, in any great railway staff. He had been, when young (if I could believe it, sitting in that hut—he scarcely could), a student of natural philosophy, and had attended lectures; but he had run wild, misused his opportunities, gone down, and never risen again. He had no complaint to offer about that. He had made his bed, and he lay upon it. It was far too late to make another.

In a word, I should have set this man down as one of the safest of men to be employed in that capacity, but for the circumstance that while he was speaking to me he twice broke off with a fallen color, turned his face toward the little bell when it did *not* ring, opened the door of the hut (which was kept shut to exclude the unhealthy damp), and looked out toward the red light near the mouth of the tunnel. On both of those occasions, he came back to the fire with the inexplicable air upon him which I had remarked, without being able to define, when we were so far asunder.

Said I, when I rose to leave him, "You almost make me think that I have met with a contented man."

(I am afraid I must acknowledge that I said it to lead him on.)

"I believe I used to be so," he rejoined, in the low voice in which he had first spoken; "but I am troubled, sir, I am troubled."

He would have recalled the words if he could. He had said them, however, and I took them up quickly.

"With what? What is your trouble?"

"It is very difficult to impart, sir. It is very, very difficult to speak of.

If ever you make me another visit, I will try to tell you."

"But I expressly intend to make you another visit. Say, when shall it be?"

"I go off early in the morning, and I shall be on again at ten tomorrow night, sir."

"I will come at eleven."

He thanked me, and went out at the door with me. "I'll show my white light, sir," he said, in his peculiar, low voice, "till you have found the way up. When you have found it, don't call out! And when you are at the top, don't call out!"

His manner seemed to make the place strike colder to me, but I said no more than "Very well."

"And when you come down tomorrow night, don't call out! Let me ask you a parting question. What made you cry, 'Halloa! Below there!' tonight?"

"Heaven knows," said I. "I cried something to that effect——"

"Not to that effect, sir. Those were the very words. I know them well."

"Admit those were the very words. I said them, no doubt, because I saw you below."

"For no other reason?"

"What other reason could I possibly have?"

"You had no feeling that they were conveyed to you in any supernatural way?"

"No."

He wished me good-night, and held up his light. I walked by the side of the down Line of rails (with a very disagreeable sensation of a train coming behind me) until I found the path. It was easier to mount than to descend, and I got back to my inn without any adventure.

PUNCTUAL to my appointment, I placed my foot on the first notch of the zigzag next night, as the distant clocks were striking eleven. He

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was waiting for me at the bottom, with his white light on.

"I have not called out," I said, when we came close together; "may I speak now?"

"By all means, sir."

"Good-night, then, and here's my hand."

"Good-night, sir, and here's mine."

With that we walked side by side to his box, entered it, closed the door, and sat down by the fire.

"I have made up my mind, sir," he began, bending forward as soon as we were seated, and speaking in a tone but a little above a whisper, "that you shall not have to ask me twice what troubles me. I took you for someone else yesterday evening. That troubles me."

"That mistake?"

"No. That someone else."

"Who is it?"

"I don't know."

"Like me?"

"I don't know. I never saw the face. The left arm is across the face, and the right arm is waved—violently waved. This way."

I followed his action with my eyes, and it was the action of an arm gesticulating, with the utmost passion and vehemence, "For God's sake, clear the way."

"One moonlight night," said the man, "I was sitting here, when I heard a voice cry, 'Halloa! Below there!' I started up, looked from that door, and saw this Someone else standing by the red light near the tunnel, waving as I just now showed you. The voice seemed hoarse with shouting, and it cried, 'Look out! Look out!' And then again, 'Halloa! Below there! Look out!' I caught up my lamp, turned it on red, and ran toward the figure, calling, 'What's wrong? What has happened? Where?' It stood just outside the blackness of the tunnel. I advanced so close upon it that I wondered at its keeping the sleeve across its eyes. I ran right up at it, and had my hand stretched out to pull the sleeve away, when it was gone."

"Into the tunnel?" said I.

"No. I ran on into the tunnel, five hundred yards. I stopped, and held up my lamp above my head, and saw the figures of the measured distance, and saw the wet stains stealing down the falls and trickling through the arch. I ran out again faster than I had run in (for I had a mortal abhorrence of the place upon me), and I looked all round the red light with my own red light, and I went up the iron ladder to the gallery atop of it, and I came down again, and ran back here. I telegraphed both ways, 'An alarm has been given. Is anything wrong?' The answer came back, both ways, 'All well.'"

Resisting the slow touch of a frozen finger tracing out my spine, I showed him how that this figure must be a deception of his sense of sight; and how that figures, originating in disease of the delicate nerves that minister to the functions of the eye, were known to have often troubled patients, some of whom had become conscious of the nature of their affliction, and had even proved it by experiments upon themselves. "As to an imaginary cry," said I, "do but listen for a moment to the wind in this unnatural valley while we speak so low, and to the wild harp it makes of the telegraph wires."

That was all very well, he returned, after he had sat listening for a while, and he ought to know something of the wind and the wires—he who so often passed long winter nights there, alone and watching. But he would beg to remark that he had not finished.

I asked his pardon, and he slowly

added these words, touching my arm:

"Within six hours after the Appearance, the memorable accident on this Line happened, and within ten hours the dead and wounded were brought along through the tunnel over the spot where the figure had stood."

A disagreeable shudder crept over me, but I did my best against it. It was not to be denied, I rejoined, that this was a remarkable coincidence, calculated deeply to impress his mind. But it was unquestionable that remarkable coincidences did continually occur, and they must be taken into account in dealing with such a subject. Though, to be sure, I must admit, I added (for I thought I saw that he was going to bring the objection to bear upon me), men of common sense did not allow much for coincidences in making the ordinary calculations of life.

He again begged to remark that he had not finished.

I again begged his pardon for being betrayed into interruptions.

"This," he said, again laying his hand upon my arm, and glancing over his shoulder with hollow eyes, "was just a year ago. Six or seven months passed, and I had recovered from the surprize and shock, when one morning, as the day was breaking, I, standing at the door, looked towards the red light, and saw the specter again." He stopped, with a fixed look at me.

"Did it cry out?"

"No. It was silent."

"Did it wave its arm?"

"No. It leaned against the shaft of the light, with both hands before the face. Like this."

Once more I followed his actions with my eyes. It was an action of mourning. I have seen such an attitude in stone figures on tombs.

"Did you go up to it?"

"I came in and sat down, partly to collect my thoughts, partly because

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it had turned me faint. When I went to the door again, daylight was above me, and the ghost was gone."

"But nothing followed? Nothing came of this?"

He touched me on the arm with his forefinger twice or thrice, giving a ghastly nod each time:

"That very day, as a train came out of the tunnel, I noticed, at a carriage window on my side, what looked like a confusion of hands and heads, and something waved. I saw it just in time to signal the driver, Stop! He shut off, and put his brakes on, but the train drifted past here a hundred and fifty yards or more. I ran after it, and, as I went along, heard terrible screams and cries. A beautiful young lady had died instantaneously in one of the compartments and was brought in here, and laid down on this floor between us."

Involuntarily I pushed my chair back, as I looked from the boards at which he pointed to himself.

"True, sir. True. Precisely as it happened, so I tell it you."

I could think of nothing to say, to any purpose, and my mouth was very dry. The wind and the wires took up the story with a long, lamenting wail.

He resumed. "Now, sir, mark this, and judge how my mind is troubled. The specter came back a week ago. Ever since, it has been there, now and again, by fits and starts."

"At the light?"

"At the Danger-light."

"What does it seem to do?"

He repeated, if possible with increased passion and vehemence, that former gesticulation of "For God's sake, clear the way!"

Then he went on. "I have no peace or rest for it. It calls to me, for many minutes together, in an agonized manner, 'Below there! Look out! Look out!' It stands waving at me. It rings my little bell——"

I caught at that. "Did it ring your bell yesterday evening when I was here, and you went to the door?"

"Twice."

"Why, see," said I, "how your imagination misleads you. My eyes were on the bell, and my ears were open to the bell, and if I am a living man, it did *not* ring at these times. No, nor at any other time, except when it was rung in the natural course of physical things by the station communicating with you."

He shook his head. "I have never made a mistake as to that yet, sir. I have never confused the specter's ring with the man's. The ghost's ring is a strange vibration in the bell that it derives from nothing else, and I have not asserted that the bell stirs to the eye. I don't wonder that you failed to hear it. But *I* heard it."

"And did the specter seem to be there, when you looked out?"

"It *was* there."

"Both times?"

He repeated firmly: "Both times."

"Will you come to the door with me, and look for it now?"

He bit his under lip as though he were somewhat unwilling, but arose. I opened the door, and stood on the step, while he stood in the doorway. There was the Danger-light. There was the dismal mouth of the tunnel. There were the high, wet, stone walls of the cutting. There were the stars above them.

"Do you see it?" I asked him, taking particular note of his face. His eyes were prominent and strained, but not very much more so, perhaps, than my own had been when I had directed them earnestly towards the same spot.

"No," he answered. "It is not there."

"Agreed," said I.

We went in again, shut the door, and resumed our seats. I was thinking how best to improve this advantage, if it might be called one,

when he took up the conversation in such a matter-of-course way, so assuming that there could be no serious question of fact between us, that I felt myself placed in the weakest of positions.

"By this time you will fully understand, sir," he said, "that what troubles me so dreadfully is the question, What does the specter mean?"

I was not sure, I told him, that I did fully understand.

"What is its warning against?" he said, ruminating, with his eyes on the fire, and only by times turning them on me. "What is the danger? What is the danger? There is danger overhanging somewhere on the Line. Some dreadful calamity will happen. It is not to be doubted this third time, after what has gone before. But surely this is a cruel haunting of *me*. What can *I* do?"

He pulled out his handkerchief, and wiped the drops from his heated forehead.

"If I telegraph Danger, on either side of me, or on both, I can give no reason for it," he went on, wiping the palms of his hands. "I should get into trouble, and do no good. They would think I was mad. This is the way it would work—Message: 'Danger! Take care!' Answer: 'What Danger? Where?' Message: 'Don't know. But, for God's sake, take care!' They would displace me. What else could they do?"

His pain of mind was most pitiable to see. It was the mental torture of a conscientious man, oppressed beyond endurance by an unintelligible responsibility involving life.

"When it first stood under the Danger-light," he went on, putting his dark hair back from his head, and drawing his hands outward across and across his temples in an extremity of feverish distress, "why not tell me where that accident was to happen—if it must happen? Why not tell me how it could be averted—if it could

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have been averted? When on its second coming it hid its face, why not tell me, instead, 'She is going to die. Let them keep her at home?' If it came, on those two occasions, only to show me that its warnings were true, and so to prepare me for the third, why not warn me plainly now? And I, Lord help me! A mere poor signal-man on this solitary station! Why not go to somebody with credit to be believed, and power to act?''

When I saw him in this state, I saw that for the poor man's sake, as well as for the public safety, what I had to do for the time was to compose his mind. Therefore, setting aside all question of reality or unreality between us, I represented to him that whoever thoroughly discharged his duty must do well, and that at least it was his comfort that he understood his duty, though he did not understand these confounding Appearances. In this effort I succeeded far better than in the attempt to reason him out of his conviction. He became calm; the occupations incidental to his post as the night advanced began to make larger demands on his attention: and I left him at two in the morning. I had offered to stay through the night, but he would not hear of it.

That I more than once looked back at the red light as I ascended the pathway, that I did not like the red light, and that I should have slept but poorly if my bed had been under it, I see no reason to conceal. Nor did I like the two sequences of the accident and the dead girl. I see no reason to conceal that either.

But what ran most in my thoughts was the consideration how ought I to act, having become the recipient of this disclosure? I had proved the man to be intelligent, vigilant, painstaking, and exact; but how long might he remain so, in his state of mind? Though in a subordinate position, still he held a most important trust, and would I (for instance) like to stake my own life on the chances of his continuing to execute it with precision?

Unable to overcome a feeling that there would be something treacherous in my communicating what he had told me to his superiors in the Company, without first being plain with himself and proposing a middle course to him, I ultimately resolved to offer to accompany him (otherwise keeping his secret for the present) to the wisest medical practitioner we could hear of in those parts, and to take his opinion. A change in his time of duty would come round next night, he had apprised me, and he would be off an hour or two after sunrise, and on again soon after sunset. I had appointed to return accordingly.

NEXT evening was a lovely evening, and I walked out early to enjoy it. The sun was not yet quite down when I traversed the field-path near the top of the deep cutting. I would extend my walk for an hour, I said to myself, half an hour on and half an hour back, and it would then be time to go to my signal-man's box.

Before pursuing my stroll, I stepped to the brink, and mechanically looked down, from the point from which I had first seen him. I can not describe the thrill that seized upon me, when, close at the mouth of the tunnel, I saw the appearance of a man, with his left sleeve across his eyes, passionately waving his right arm.

The nameless horror that oppressed me passed in a moment, for in a moment I saw that this appearance of a man was a man indeed, and that there was a little group of other men, standing at a short distance, to whom he seemed to be rehearsing the gesture he made. The Danger-light was not yet lighted. Against its shaft, a little low hut, entirely new to me, had been made of some wooden supports and tarpaulin. It looked no bigger than a bed.

"What is the matter?" I asked the men.

"Signal-man killed this morning, sir."

"Not the man belonging to that box?"

"Yes, sir."

"Not the man I know?"

"You will recognize him, sir, if you knew him," said the man who spoke for the others, solemnly uncovering his own head, and raising an end of the tarpaulin, "for his face is quite composed."

"Oh, how did this happen? how did this happen?" I asked, turning from one to another as the hut closed in again.

"He was cut down by an engine, sir. No man in England knew his work better. But somehow he was not clear of the outer rail. It was just at broad day. He had struck the light, and had the lamp in his hand. As the engine came out of the tunnel, his back was toward her, and she cut him down. That man drove her, and he was showing how it happened. Show the gentleman, Tom."

The man, who wore a rough, dark dress, stepped back to his former place at the mouth of the tunnel.

"Coming round the curve in the tunnel, sir," he said, "I saw him at the end, like as if I saw him down a perspective-glass. There was no time to check speed, and I knew him to be very careful. As he didn't seem to take heed of the whistle, I shut it off when we were running down upon him, and called to him as loud as I could."

"What did you say?"

"I said, 'Below there! Look out! Look out! For God's sake, clear the way!'"

I started.

"Ah! it was a dreadful time, sir. I never left off calling to him. I put this arm before my eyes not to see, and I waved this arm to the last; but it was no use."

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The Dust of Egypt

(Continued from page 462)

eggs grow in the body of their victim. And when your uncle read of the young Englishman's death, and how he was the tenth to die of those who opened Tutankhamen's tomb, such doubts as he might have had disappeared utterly. He did resign himself to death by Sepa's vengeance.

"Your sister, being sensitive to thought-influence, at length became infected, too. It was as if your uncle, all unknowingly, transferred his fearful thoughts to her subconscious mind, much as a hypnotist imposes his thought and will upon his subject. Your sister is tall, stately, beautiful. She had the peculiar greenish eyes which go with mysticism. What more natural than that your uncle should have conceived the Goddess Aset as in your sister's image, and, so conceiving, impregnated your sister with his thought. All unknowingly, she was to him, and to herself, the very incarnation of that olden one—that probably non-existent one—whose wrath had been called down on *Monsieur* your kinsman by the curse-stone found in Sepa's grave.

"Very good. Upon the night in which your uncle died your sister did arise, descend the stairs into the museum, and there equip herself with the garments once worn by some Egyptian priestess. Consider, now: She did not consciously know what was in those cabinets below, she knew not which keys fitted the locks, she did not know how the ancient priestesses arrayed themselves, for she had no knowledge of archeology; yet she went unerringly to the proper case, chose the proper trappings, and donned them in the proper manner. Why? *Because your uncle's thought guided her!*

"All this she did at the urge of her subconscious mind. Her conscious mind, by which she recognized external things, was fast asleep meanwhile. Yet so deftly did her dream-commanded mind order the disguise that she even went so far as to trace the likeness of open, staring eyes upon her lids with phosphorescent paint.

"And then, arrayed as Aset, she did repair to your uncle's room, and with her went the thought-concept of another one, the thought-induced and thought-begotten likeness of the long-dead Sepa.

"With ancient ritual she read aloud your uncle's doom, the doom he had decreed upon himself by his persistent thought, and he—poor man!—believing that his doom was sealed, did die for very fright.

"Now, concerning yourself: Like her, you knew of the curse; like her you had read of the death of the young Englishman who violated the tomb of Tutankhamen. Very well. Subconsciously you feared the curse which Sepa had put upon your uncle and your uncle's kin hovered over you. Although you strove to shake it off, the thought would not die, for the more you dismissed it from your conscious mind, the deeper it penetrated into your subconscious, there to fester like a septic splinter in one's finger. Yes.

"Last night was the crucial time. Once more *Mademoiselle* your sister donned Aset's unholy livery; once more she did pronounce the doom of Sepa upon your uncle's kin—and, *parbleu*, she did almost succeed in doing it! Friend Trowbridge and I were not a second too soon, I damn think."

"But the mark—the mark on Uncle Absalom's breast, and which Dr. Trowbridge said appeared on mine, too; what of that?" young Monteith persisted.

"Perhaps you have not seen it, but

I have," de Grandin returned: "a hypnotist can, by his bare mental command, cause the blood to leave his subject's arm, and make the member become white and cold as death. So with the death-sign on your uncle's breast, and yours. It was but the stigma of a mental order—a thought made physically manifest."

"But what did you do—what did you use?" Monteith demanded. "I saw you drive the ghost of Sepa from the room with something. What was it?"

"To understand, you must know the history of Isis," de Grandin answered. "Her cult was one of the most powerful of all the ancient world. Despite the sternest opposition she had her votaries in both Greece and Rome, and she was the last of the old gods to be expelled from Egypt, for notwithstanding the Christianizing of the land and the great strength of the Alexandrian Church, her shrine at Philae continued to draw worshipers until the Sixth Century of our era.

"Now, while Christianity still struggled with the remnant of the olden faiths there lived in Alexandria a certain priest named Cyril, a very holy man, who by virtue of his piety wrought many miracles. Also, when more than once the women of his congregation declared themselves spell-bound by the ancient Goddess Aset, he was wont to cast the spell from off them by the use of a certain sacred amulet, a little cross of gold supposed to hold a tiny remnant of the True Cross within itself. This very sacred reliquary is in the present custody of the *Papa* of the Greek Orthodox Church in Harrisonville. Often have I heard the old man speak of it.

"Accordingly, when we came here to 'Journey's End' to try conclusions with the ancient gods of Egypt, I begged the use of that same relic from its custodian and brought it with me.

"And, as I have said, thoughts have power. It was the thought of Priest Sepa's ancient curse which worked

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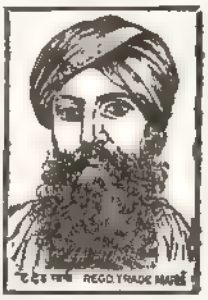

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the death of your uncle and all but caused your own; yet here was a little, so small piece of gold which also carried the concentrated thought of centuries. Adored as a easter-out-of-spells by generations of pious Christians, once regarded as efficacious against the same old goddess by whom your house was so beset, it was ideally suited to my purpose. I did fight thought with counter-thought; against the evil thought-concepts of Aset and of Sepa her priest I set the defensive thought-power of Cyril, the Alexandrian monk, who once cast Aset forth from out the bodies of his bewitched parishioners. The tiny relic in my hand focussed, so to speak, the thoughts which negatived the harmful power of Aset and her followers, and —Aset and her ghostly worshiper are gone. If——"

"I—don't—believe—a—word—of—it!" Monteith interrupted slowly. "You're saying all this to shield Louella. She's bad—wicked clear through, and I don't ever want to see her again. I——"

"*Monsieur!*" de Grandin's voice was sharp-edged as a razor. "Look at this!"

Once more he drew the little golden cross of Cyril from his pocket, holding it before the young man's eyes. As young Monteith gazed wonderingly at it, the Frenchman continued in a low, earnest voice: "You will hear and obey. You will sleep for half an hour, at which time you will awake, completely forgetting all which occurred last night, remembering only that the thing which menaced your family and household has forever departed. Sleep. Sleep and forget. I command it!

"And that, my friend, is that," he announced matter-of-factly as Monteith's eyelids lowered in compliance with his order.

"Now what?" I asked.

"I think we would better burn the mummy of Priest Sepa and the translation of his curse-stone," he responded. "The uncle's will absolved his legatees from burying the mummy if it became physically impossible—I purpose rendering it so. Come, let us cremate the old one."

Together we dismembered the desiccated corpse of the Egyptian, casting the pieces on the glowing coals of the furnace, where they burned with sharp, fierce spurts of flame and quickly turned to light, gray ashes which wafted upward through the draft of the firebox.

"What about that uncanny feeling Louella complained of, de Grandin?" I asked as we pursued our grisly task. "You know, she said she felt as though someone were staring at her from behind?"

"*Mais oui,*" he chuckled as he fed a mumified forearm to the flames. "I shall say she had good cause to feel so. Did not the excellent Maggie and her husband stare her out of countenance from the rear, always seeking to see her take a third helping of food or wine? *Parbleu,* Mademoiselle Louella desired the boyish figure, therefore she eats sparingly, therefore she is tried and condemned by the so excellent Irish couple on the charge of being a fairy! *C'est drôle, n'est-ce-pas?*"

WHEN we returned to the upper floor, David Monteith was up and disposing of an excellent breakfast.

"Good old Lou," we heard him tell his sister, "of course, I wasn't ill last night. I slept like a top—overslept, in fact; aren't I an hour late to breakfast?" He smiled and patted his sister's hand reassuringly.

"Ah, *parbleu,* Jules de Grandin, you are clever!" the little Frenchman murmured delightedly. "You have removed all danger from these young people and assured their happiness by exorcising the devil of bad memories. Yes. Come with me, Jules de Grandin; I shall take you to the library and give you a magnificent-great drink of whisky."

The Shut Room

(Continued from page 480)

cropped, iron-gray hair, wearing a fine satin coat and what were called, in their day, "small clothes," or tight-fitting knee-trousers with silk stockings and heavy, buckled shoes, was raising and fitting about his waist, over the coat, the "harness" with the pistols.

Abruptly, the materialization appearing to be now complete, he turned upon us, with an audible snarl and baleful, glaring little eyes like a pig's, deep set in a hideous, scarred face, and then he spoke—he spoke, and he had been dead for more than a century!

"Ah-h-h-h!" he snarled, evilly, "ye would come in upon me, eh, my fine gents—into this my chamber, eh! I'll teach ye manners . . ." and he ended this diatribe with a flood of the foulest language imaginable, stepping, with little, almost mincing, down-toed steps toward us all the time he poured out his filthy curses and revilings. I was completely at a loss what to do. I realized—these ideas went through my mind with the rapidity of thought—that the pistols were unloaded! I told myself that this was some weird hallucination—that the shade of no dead-and-gone desperado could harm us. Yet—it was a truly terrifying experience, be the man shade or true flesh and blood.

Then Carruth spoke to him, in quiet, persuasive tones.

"But—you have your pistols now, Simon Forrester. It was we who put them where you could find them, your pretty boys, 'Jem and Jack.' That was what you were trying to find, was it not? And now—you have them. There is nothing further for you to do—you have them, they are just under your hands where you can get at them whenever you wish."

At this the specter, or materialization of Simon Forrester, blinked at

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us, a cunning light in his evil little eyes, and dropped his hands with which he had but now been gesticulating violently on the grips of the pistols. He grinned, evilly, and spat in a strange fashion, over his shoulder.

"Ay," said he, more moderately now, "ay—I have 'em—Jemmy and Jack, my trusties, my pretty boys." He fondled the butts with his huge hands, hands that could have strangled an ox, and spat again over his shoulder.

"There is no necessity for you to remain, then, is there?" said Carruth softly, persuasively.

The simulacrum of Simon Forrester frowned, looked a bit puzzled, then nodded its head several times.

"You can rest now—now that you have Jem and Jack," suggested Carruth, almost in a whisper, and as he spoke, Forrester turned away and stepped over to the blank wall at the far side of the room, opposite the doorway, and I could hear Carruth draw in his breath softly and feel the iron grip of his fingers on my arm. "Watch!" he whispered in my ear; "watch now."

The solid wall seemed to wave and buckle before Forrester, almost as though it were not a wall but a sheet of white cloth, held and waved by hands as cloth is waved in a theater to simulate waves. More and more cloth-like the wall became, and, as we gazed at this strange sight, the simulacrum of Simon Forrester seemed to become less opaque, to melt and blend in with the wavering wall, which gradually ceased to move, and then he was gone and the wall was as it had been before. . . .

ON MONDAY morning, at Carruth's urgent solicitation, Snow assembled a force of laborers, and we watched while they broke down the wall of "the shut room" opposite the doorway. At last, as Carruth had expected, a pick went through, and, the interested workmen, laboring with a will, broke through into a small, narrow, cell-like room the plaster of which indicated that it had been walled up perhaps two centuries before, or even earlier—a "priest's hole" in all probability, of the early post-reformation period near the end of the Sixteenth Century.

Carruth stopped the work as soon as it was plain what was here, and turned out the workmen, who went protestingly. Then, with only our host working beside us, and the door of the room locked on the inside, we continued the job. At last the aperture was large enough, and Carruth went through. We heard an exclamation from him, and then he began to hand out articles through the rough hole in the masonry—leather articles—boots innumerable, ladies' reticules, hand-luggage, the missing jeweler's sample case with its contents intact—innumerable other articles, and, last of all, the "harness" with the pistols in the holsters.

Carruth explained the "jester case" to Snow, who shook his head over it. "It's quite beyond me, Lord Carruth," said he, "but, as you say this annoyance is at an end, I am quite satisfied; and—I'll take your advice and make sure by pulling down the whole room, breaking out the corridor walls, and joining it to the room across the way. I confess I can not make head or tail of your explanation—the unfulfilled wish, the 'sympathetic pervasion' of the room as you call it, the 'materialization,' and the strange fact that this business began only a short time ago. But—I'll do exactly what you have recommended, about the room, that is. The restoration of the jeweler's case will undoubtedly make it possible for me to get back the sum I paid Messrs. Hopkins and Barth of Liverpool when it disappeared in my house. Can you give any explanation of why the 'shade' of Forrester remained quiet for a century and more and only started up the other day, so to speak?"

"It is because the power to materialize came very slowly," answered Carruth, "coupled as it undoubtedly was with the gradual breaking down of the room's material resistance. It is very difficult to realize the extraordinary force of an unfulfilled wish, on the part of a forceful, brutal, wholly selfish personality like Forrester's. It is, really, what we must call spiritual power, even though the 'spirituality' was the reverse of what we commonly understand by that term. The wish and the force of Forrester's persistent desire, through the century, have been working steadily, and, as you have told us, the room has been out of use for more than a century. There were no common, everyday affairs to counteract that malign influence—no 'interruptions,' if I make myself clear."

"Thank you," said Mr. Snow. "I do not clearly understand. These matters are outside my province. But—I am exceedingly grateful—to you both." Our host bowed courteously. "Anything that I can possibly do, in return——"

"There is nothing—nothing whatever," said Carruth quietly; "but, Mr. Snow, there is another problem on your hands which perhaps you will have some difficulty in solving, and concerning which, to our regret"—he looked gravely at me—"I fear neither Mr. Canevin with his experience, nor I with mine, will be able to assist you."

"And what, pray, is that?" asked Mr. Snow, turning slightly pale. He would, I perceive, be very well satisfied to have his problems behind him.

"The problem is," said Carruth, even more gravely I imagined, "it is—what disposal are you to make of fifty-eight pairs of assorted boots and shoes!"

And Snow's relieved laughter was the last of the impressions which I took with me as we rode back to London in Carruth's car, of "The Coach and Horses" inn on the Brighton Road.

NEXT MONTH

The

BRAIN-THIEF

By SEABURY QUINN

KIT NORTON came home one day and found the wife of his best friend was there with a baby—*his* baby; and to his horror he learned that his own wife had divorced him two years before, that he had married this other woman and treated his first wife so shamefully that his name was a byword throughout the city. Time had stood still for two years both for him and the other woman, and neither of them remembered a solitary happening of those two years of scandal and disgrace.

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ON A sleeping-mat, native style, lay General Jui-yin, at the far side of the room. O'Neill closed the door silently, and crossed the floor. Except for the cloisonné dragon, the room was quite bare, without luxury. He dropped the rattan on a table, and plucked out his pistol.

At this instant, the sleeping man opened his eyes.

"Lung! How dare you——"

O'Neill jerked with the pistol. An expression of the utmost astonishment leaped into the massive, powerful features of Jui-yin as he saw that this man was not Lung after all.

"Quiet," said O'Neill. "No, I am not Lung. Lung is dead, and you will follow him if you don't lie still. Put your hands outside the covers—quick! That's right."

Reaching up with his free hand, he worked loose the false mustache, and threw off the cap with its dragon insignia. Recognition dawned in the eyes of Jui-yin; recognition, and a flame of gathering fury.

"You!"

"Exactly," said O'Neill. "And now I have you just where I want you, my dear general."

The brutal features before him became suffused with blood, then paled again.

"How did you get here?" snapped the general.

"By virtue of my dragon blood. You did not know that I was a descendant of dragons?" O'Neill lifted one eyebrow, regarded him whimsically. "But you saw me arrive in a green dragon. You should have taken warning. And that airplane is not a present for you at all. It is very far from being yours, just as you are very far from marrying the daughter of Doctor Sanson."

He beamed cheerfully on the yellow man, who was now thoroughly roused.

The face of Jui-yin was a study in fleeting expressions. Fury, chagrin, astonishment, succeeded one another; his lurid eyes narrowed, watching O'Neill like the eyes of an intent tiger. His lip curled in a sneer. . . .

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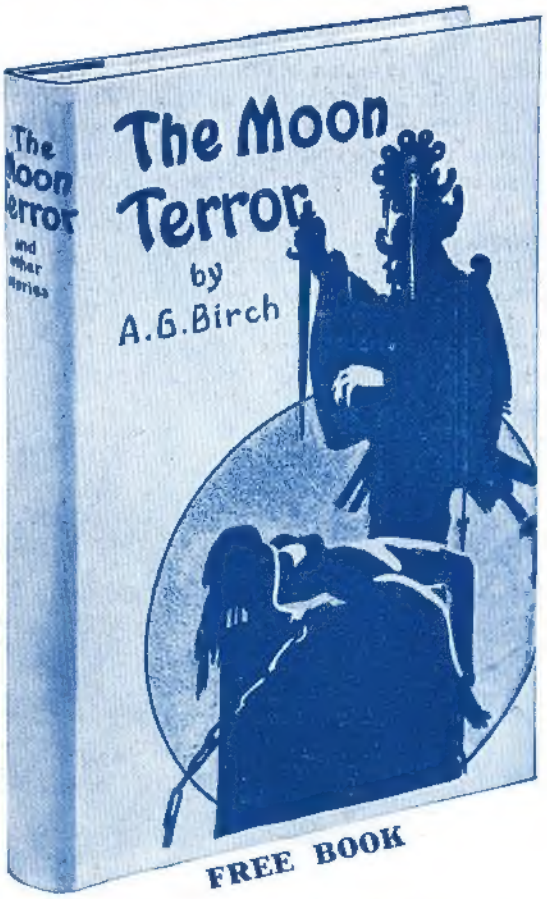

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